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THE BIG TOMORROW
By PAUL LOHRMAN

A BRILLIANT NOVEL BY H. L. GOLD & R. W. KREPPS
Richard Matheson • Robert Sheckley • Vern Fearing

ROCKET STATION ON LUNA



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THE BIG TOMORROW

BY PAUL LOHRMAN

There are certain rare individuals in this world who seem bereft of all common sense. These are the people who set their eyes upon an objective and, immediately all intelligence, logic, good advice, unsolvable problems, and insurmountable obstacles go completely by the boards. The characters we refer to are obviously just plain stupid. What they want to do, just can't be done. The objectives they have in mind are unachievable and anyone with an ounce of brains can tell them so and give them good reasons. They are usually pretty sad cases and often land in the funny house. But then again, some of them go out and discover new worlds.

HE hadn't gotten any work done that morning. He'd spent most of the time pacing the floor of his small back office, and the rest of it at the window — hands clasped behind his somewhat bowed back — staring up into the cloudless sky.

At ten-forty, the intercomm buzzed. He snapped the switch.

"Yes?"

"I've got those figures, Mr. Lake. We have nine —"

"Maybe you'd better come in and tell me personally, Lucy."

"All right, Mr. Lake."

The intercomm snapped off and a few moments later a girl entered the office — if the prim little wisp that was Lucy Crane could be so generously classified.

Joshua Lake stared at the elongated bun of black hair on the top of her head as she came toward his desk. There was an odd streak of rich imagination in Joshua Lake and he always felt Lucy Crane's bun was a symbol of disapproval. "Sit down, Lucy. You use up too much energy."

"I try to do my job, Mr. Lake."

"You do that — and more."

"What are the figures, Lucy?"

"We're in desperate shape. We have nine thousand, four hundred and twenty dollars in the payroll account. That leaves it over five thousand short. There is only about two thousand in General Disbursements, but that isn't enough to cover invoices due tomorrow. I'm afraid —"

"Don't be afraid, Lucy. That's negative. If we waste our time sitting around shivering, we won't make any progress at all."

"I didn't mean it that way, Mr. Lake. I'm not shivering. I was merely stating that we haven't got enough money."

"Then I'll go to the bank and get some more."

"Of course, Mr. Lake. Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all, Lucy. You run on to lunch."

"You aren't going out?"

"No, I'm not hungry today."

Her bun bobbed in disapproval as she left the office. Joshua Lake stared at the closed door and sighed. Lucy knew exactly how things were. She wasn't one to be fooled. But Joshua hoped the rest of the personnel were not so perceptive. The engineers and the draftsmen particularly. They could all walk out at noon and be working somewhere else by one o'clock, what with the huge current industrial demand.

He walked again to the window; an old man; bone-weary, with the

weight of his sixty-odd years bending his shoulders like a brick-carrier's hod.

"Then I'll go to the bank and get some more." He hadn't even fooled himself this time. His chances at the bank were nil. Less than nil. His very presence there could tip the balance of their decision. Loans could be called; the doors locked before nightfall.

At the window, he lowered his eyes from the sky and looked to the gate that led into the horse-shoe sweep of low buildings and back to the great, bulking hangar where precious work was being done.

A man and his dream, Lake mused.

He could see only the back of the sign hanging over the gate, but he was quite familiar with the other side. *Lake Interstellar Enterprises* in bold, brave letters; and in the lower right-hand corner — barely discernible — *Joshua Lake — President*.

A visitor looking closely at the sign could see that it had been done over — that a discarded legend lay beneath a coat of white paint. The old name of the firm was still faintly visible: *Lake and Gorman — Castings and Extensions*.

It wasn't difficult for Joshua to conjure up Lee Gorman's craggy, hostile face. Nor his words. Lee had a voice like gravel being

ground to powder. A voice to remember . . .

"Of course I won't go along with this damn-fool idea of yours! Turn a perfectly sound, entrenched business into a blue-sky factory? You've gone crazy, Joshua."

"But it's feasible, Lee! Entirely feasible. All we need is a little imagination. I've investigated. I've hired the best brains in the world. I have all the necessary preliminary data. A rocket can be built that will take three men to the Moon and bring them back!"

"That's idiocy, Joshua!"

"Don't you believe it can be done?"

"I don't care whether it can be done or not!"

"But open your eyes, man! This is an age of development. An era of movement. We're on the threshold of the big tomorrow, and we can't let it pass us by! We can't let the honor and the glory go to others while we sit on our hands and hoot from the gallery! Come alive, Lee! The world is passing us!"

"I don't want honor and glory. All I want is a sound going business. Suppose we could put a rocket on the Moon and bring it back? Where would that leave us? Broke and famous. And laughed at probably in the bargain."

"Nothing of the kind. We could write our own ticket. We'd control the gateway to the greatest

mineral deposits within reach of Man! Think of it, Lee. Use your imagination."

"I won't go along with you, Joshua. That's all there is to it."

More of the same; days of it, and finally: "You can have the customers then, Lee. I'll keep the plant — the physical properties."

"But that's not fair."

"Perhaps not, but it's legal."

"How can I service them — from my basement?"

"I offered you an alternative only a fool would have turned down —"

"That only a fool would accept!"

"— so now I'm going ahead and nothing can stop me. I've got a dream, man — a dream of a big tomorrow. I'm going to make that dream come true."

"Name it right, Joshua. You've got an obsession."

The end of *Lake and Carman*. . . .

Joshua turned from the window, then paused and looked again into the sky. The Moon was up, a round, white will-o-the-wisp in the clear blue afternoon sky. He stared at it and the old feeling of affinity swept over him, stronger than ever. The Moon was, for him, both a goal and a tonic. Sight of its illusive form could always sweep away his doubts; straighten his shoulders.

The intercomm buzzed. Joshua went over and snapped it. "Yes?"

"Mr. Coving to see you, sir."

"Send him in."

Rayburn Coving was probably the best rocket-fuel man in the world. He had a little of his sandy hair left, not much, and his forehead was permanently creased from frowning. "I'm afraid that new benzoid derivative is a failure, Chief. It piles up corrosion in the tubes too fast. They'd be clogged halfway through the trip."

One hundred and twenty thousand dollars up the spout. Joshua sighed. "Well, I suppose the chance of success was worth it. The added power in relatively smaller space would have solved so many other problems."

"I'm sorry it failed."

Joshua smiled. "To paraphrase a certain American inventor — we're finding any number of ways you can't go to the Moon. What now, Coving?"

"Back to the old method — and the other problems. None of them are insurmountable, though. A little more time —"

"Yes — a little more time."

Joshua grimaced inwardly. He was talking to Coving as though they had years — not as though their time had run out. He was even in debt for Coving's labor; overdrawn on it without enough money to pay.

The moment of weakness — of deep-down weariness — passed. Joshua Lake stiffened as he had stiffened so many times before.

As he had stiffened when Zoro-off's alloys had flunked out and the first trip to the bank had been made necessary. The first trip to the bank. Joshua smiled wryly. The bank people had been cordial then. Even servile. Later it had been different. Now —

"You were saying, Mr. Lake—?"

"Have you seen Morton lately? What's the latest on the radar relay equipment?"

"No major bugs, I think. It's coming along famously."

"Good!" For two hundred odd thousand it certainly should, Joshua felt. "Let me know how you make out, Coving."

"I will, Chief. I'll get the order in for the new chemicals immediately."

"Eh — oh, yes. Do that. Do that by all means."

Coving left. Joshua Lake put his head against the back rest of the chair and closed his eyes. He dozed, drifting into a haze from weariness. *It's been so long — so very long. Seven years — eight — ten. Ten years. Good heavens! Was it possible? It didn't seem that long. Ten years to make a dream succeed.*

Or fail.

Joshua slept and again — as in the past — his rest was plagued with visions. The torment of his days took many forms in an alert subconscious too taut to relax. He had seen before him mountains too steep to cross — chasms too

deep and wide to bridge. Often, when a great problem was solved, he would look back, nights later, to see the mountain or the chasm from the other side.

Now his vision was different. No mountain before him, but a face — the stern craggy face of an obstacle in his path.

Lee Gorman.

The face was of clay — yet it lived. The eyes were cold, distainful. And a weird, green creation of Joshua's own mind was sketching Gorman in the numbers, signs, and symbols of a rocket that would never reach the Moon.

Joshua awoke with a start and found Lucy bending over him. "You didn't answer the buzzer, Mr. Lake. I was worried."

"I must have dozed off, Lucy. Sorry."

"I'm going home now — if there's nothing else."

"Nothing else. I'm going home myself. Good night."

Joshua paused beside his car in the parking lot to stare at the lighted windows of the big hangar. The second shift had come on. They would work all night; then, tomorrow, they would line up with the others at the pay window. But there wouldn't be any money. The next night the hangar windows would be dark.

He got into the car and drove home.

Myra was waiting for him. She took his hat. After he kissed her,

she said, "Your eyes are red, dear. You've been working much too hard. Shall we have dinner in the patio?"

"That would be nice."

Joshua had little to say during the meal, and Myra was quiet also — adjusting herself, as she had always done, to his mood. Finally, she said, "That will be all, Bertha. Leave the coffee pot."

The maid left. A slight chill was coming in off the desert. Joshua shivered and said, "We're through, Myra."

"Through? I don't understand."

"The Moon trip. I can't swing it. The money's run out. There's no place I can raise another dime."

"But you've worked so hard — and so long! And you are so close to success."

"We've made a lot of progress, but the rocket isn't ready yet. Now it's too late."

They were silent for a time. Then Myra said, "In a way, I'm glad. You should have stopped long ago. You aren't strong enough to stand this pace forever. Now we can go away — get a small place somewhere. That Moon rocket was killing you, Joshua."

Joshua pondered the point "Killing me? No, I don't think so. I think it has been keeping me alive."

"Don't say that, dear! You make it sound so — so brutal!

Year in and year out. Fighting disappointment — failure. Aging before my eyes while I sit here night after night!"

Fighting disappointment — failure. Yes. That was the kind of fight it had been. How many failures? The first big one had come six years before. . . .

"Acceleration, Monsieur, must be achieved in the first two thousand miles of flight. After that, the speed of the ship remains constant. You follow me?" Tardeau, the half-mad French genius had explained it so logically. And Joshua had believed in him. That's where you made your big gamble in a project of this kind. You selected your men and then believed in them. Others dissented, of course. There are always dissenters. And always points that could not be proven or disproven on the drawing boards or in the test pits . . .

"I follow you, Henri. The booster units will be in three sections."

"Exactly, Maieu. The primary — ah, booster, as you say, breaks free at twelve miles. That one, and the secondary, we control with radar. We touch a button and Voila! they are free!"

"In case of the men in the ship blacking out, I think you said."

"Exactly. But the third will be disengaged from within the ship and she will be free as a bird to

fly to your most illusive Moon!"

"And the return?"

"There we have a much lighter ship, Monsieur. The smaller boosters will lift her easily. The return trip will be slower — much slower, but she will return!"

Michael Bernard was the dissenter. "The Frenchman's crazy!" Mad as a hatter, Chief."

"You think it won't work, then?"

"Too damn complicated. A dozen units of time and mechanism have to mesh perfectly. The odds are against that happening. After all, you've got to remember, what we're attempting has never been done before."

"But if it did work —?"

"It would be a beauty."

"Better than your idea of a single booster?"

"If it worked — yes. The weight problem would be solved. Five men could ride the rocket. But —"

"Let's try it, Mike. Let's believe in our destiny."

"Okay — you're the boss. But destiny's a hard thing to lay out and analyze on a drawing board."

A man and his dream. . . .

The radar equipment had failed. Burdened with the weight of exhausted booster sections, the rocket curved back into the clutches of gravity.

It crashed on the fringe of the Amazon jungles.

Five Moon pioneers dead. Three

uninsured, dependent families. Joshua provided for them, but the critical newspapers overlooked that point. One editorial observed that Joshua Lake would get a rocket to the Moon and back if it took every able-bodied man in the country. The project would have died right there if Joshua had needed money. No bank in the nation would have loaned him a dime. Fortunately he was not yet broke. He started over.

Fortunately?

At times he had wondered. But always, his faith had returned to buoy him up . . .

Joshua reached out and took Myra's hand. He looked up into the sky. "You may be wrong, my dear. Possibly it's the other way. A man's ambition —" he smiled. "Lee called it an obsession once. A man's dream can keep him alive."

"But why does it have to be so hard? Why can't one of the big corporations help you? They'll profit from your success!"

"At least I had no competition in the fulfillment of my dream."

They were silent for a time; then Myra said, "But now you can rest. We'll go away. We don't need much money. We'll have a garden. You can lie in the sun."

He laughed softly; not with humor; rather from a quiet, new-welling courage. We're talking as though it were all over — finished,

done with. That isn't right."

She glanced at him quickly. "But you just said —"

"I know. But I didn't really mean it that way. We aren't through yet."

"You know where you can raise — more money?"

"I know where it is. I'm going to see Lee Gorman tomorrow."

"Lee Gorman! You aren't serious."

"There's no place else to go."

"You'll be wasting your time, Joshua. He'll — he'll humiliate you."

"He probably will. And I may not get the money. But there's no place else to go."

Tears came into Myra's eyes. "Don't do it, Joshua. Please don't do it."

"It won't be as bad as you think, dear. I guess Lee is entitled to crow a little."

Lee Gorman looked at the intercomm on his desk as though it had snapped at him. "Who?" he barked. But there had been no mistake. Gorman sat in puzzled silence for a few moments. Then he said, "All right, show him in."

Joshua Lake entered the office with his hat in one hand and a briefcase in the other. He paused halfway to Gorman's desk. "You haven't changed much, Lee."

"You have," Gorman answered.

"You look like the devil."

"I've been working hard."

Joshua Lake covered the intervening distance and stood before the desk. Gorman surveyed him coldly — up and down. Joshua looked around the office as Gorman sat silent, not inviting him to sit down.

"You've done very well, Lee. This is the first time I've seen your plant."

"I've expanded a little since my basement days. You remember my basement days, don't you Joshua?"

Joshua winced. "Yes I remember."

"And now you might tell me the purpose of this visit."

"I came to you because I need money."

Gorman's eyes snapped open — wide. He opened his mouth to speak. He failed, tightened his throat and tried again. "You came here after *what*?"

"Money. I'm broke, Lee. I haven't enough to meet my pay roll."

"You expect me to bail you out — clean up your debts — put you clear?"

"I came after more than that. Merely bailing me out wouldn't help a bit. I need three hundred thousand to put my rocket in the air."

Gorman collapsed gently back into his chair like a balloon mercifully relieved of some of its content. When he spoke, it was with a slow, controlled viciousness.

"I've heard of guts, Joshua. I've heard of gall — plain unmitigated nerve. But this tops anything — why man, you threw me out! You robbed me! You left me standing in the street with a bookful of names and addresses under my arm — nothing more. Now you come here and ask for money!"

"I'm glad you've done well, Lee. There was nothing personal in what I did. I'm glad you've gone on to even bigger things than we would have achieved together."

"You're glad I've done well! Why you pious hypocrite! I ought to have you thrown through the window instead of merely ordering you out!"

"There is no reason why I should expect any better treatment, Lee. But I had to come here. You were my last hope. I had to ask."

Joshua turned slowly from the desk. He had taken but three steps when Lee Gorman said, "Wait a minute. I'm curious. Are you *really* still at it — beating your brains out against that stone wall?"

"It's my dream, Lee. I've got to be the first man to put a rocket on the moon."

"But now you're broke — washed up. What's with the dream now?"

"I guess it's finished." Joshua turned and took another step; but Gorman was loath to let him go.

"Tell me," Gorman said. "What have you got in that briefcase?"

"Progress reports. Plans. I wanted to show them to you."

Gorman grinned. "All right. I've got a few minutes. Come and do it."

Joshua Lake retraced his steps. He sat down in a chair next to Gorman's desk. He laid his hat on the desk and snapped open the case.

"No," Gorman said. "Stand here by my elbow. The chair is for people I meet on even terms."

Joshua got obediently to his feet and placed himself as directed.

"And your hat," Gorman added. "You'd better hold that. You might forget it when you leave."

"Of course, Lee."

It was a ludicrous, pitiful sight but, withal, a grim note ran through the scene. Joshua supporting the case against his thigh, got out a sheaf of papers. These are the progress reports to date. These, the projected plans."

"And when these plans are carried out you expect success?"

"Yes. Great foresight has been used. They will carry us through."

"And you expect me to loan you money on the strength of this — this day-dreaming on paper?"

"It's far more than that, Lee. You'll find the plans sound."

Lee Gorman didn't give a tinker's hoot for the plans. He was only enjoying an interview — a

vengeance — he was loath to terminate. "You haven't even begun to show me what I'd need before I even considered loaning you a dime."

"I'll bring you anything you want."

"Even if I promise to turn you down after I've gone over it."

"You're calling the dance, Lee."

"All right — I'll call it. Bring me your payroll records; your cost sheets; the background reports on the key men in your organization."

"As soon as I can get them. I need some money immediately to meet my payroll."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"I'll be back this afternoon." Joshua was halfway out the door when Lee Gorman called. "And bring the deeds to your plant — the bills of sale to your machinery and equipment."

"Certainly."

Joshua left and Lee Gorman sat motionless staring at the surface of his desk. There was a Mona Lisa smile on his rugged face.

"It's not worth it, Joshua," Myra said, hotly. "You won't be able to take his brow-beating and badgering day after day. And that's his intention. That's what he's giving you the money for — for the pleasure of humiliating you day after day."

"Of course, my dear. I'm fortunate that Lee is that kind of a

man. He wants his revenge and he's willing to pay for it. I was hoping it would be that way — praying for it. It was my last weapon. The last weapon I had with which to beat the Moon."

A man and his dream . . .

"I want you to sign these papers, Joshua." Lee Gorman held out a pen and pushed the papers across the desk.

"Certainly, Lee."

"Four copies."

Joshua pushed the papers back, looked at them and smiled. "Do you know what you signed?"

"A power of attorney, I believe. And I've signed the plant over to you. There is a large mortgage against it, however."

Lee Gorman sat back, narrowed his eyes as he looked at the wizened little man with the giant obsession. "Joshua, I think you've worked beyond your time. You've slipped your gears completely. Do you realize that with these papers I can put you in the street? That all I have to do is raise my hand and you're done?"

"I realize that, Lee."

"Then why on earth did you sign them?"

"I had no alternative."

"But what kind of an alternative is this? Giving away everything you've got?"

Joshua sighed. "You haven't raised your hand yet, Lee. I can surmount my difficulties only as I come to them. I'll think about

that one when it gets here."

"Well — I've got news for you. The time to think about it is —" Gorman stopped in mid-sentence. He studied Joshua Lake for a long minute. Then he took a checkbook from his desk and wrote rapidly. "There's money to meet your payroll. The exact amount." Take it to the bank. Then, I want you in this office every day at four-thirty with a complete report of what's gone on. Don't overlook a thing. And bring any bills with you that want paying, together with material orders and projected costs. Is that clear?"

"I understand, Lee." At the door, Joshua Lake turned for a moment. "And — thank you — thank you very much."

After Joshua had left, Lee Gorman pondered one of those last words. If they contained any bitterness, it was well hidden. "A strange man," Gorman muttered. "A very strange man."

If that constituted a weak moment on the part of Lee Gorman, his dikes were repaired well in time to present a hostile front. . . .

"This twelve thousand to American Chemical — what are you doing — running an experimental laboratory on the side. I won't pay it."

"I've never questioned Coving's judgment in these matters, Lee. He's done brilliant work for us. The man has to have materials to work with."

"Well, you certainly should have questioned him. He's been satisfying every whim of curiosity that pops into his mind. Send the stuff back."

"But that would be fatal to the project. The fuel must be power-charged to safely handle the weight and time quotients. Coving can't work with salt and baking soda."

"I don't care what he works with. Cut three thousand off that bill."

"Very well, Lee."

A man and his dream . . .

"This payroll's out of all reason. Cut fifteen men off immediately."

"I'll see what I can do."

"Cut fifteen men off immediately."

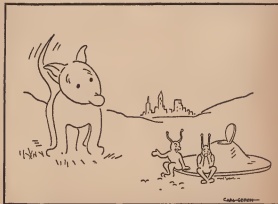
"Of course."

"Here's a check for the interest on the last note. Take it over to the bank."

"Yes, Lee."

Joshua Lake came and went as directed. He stood with his hat in his hand, took orders, carried them out. His shoulders drooped a little more; his face became more pinched; he retreated deeper and deeper into himself.

But as the days went on, his eyes brightened and there was a breathlessness in his expression when he turned his face to the sky.



"But there was no reason to expect them to look like us."

Some three months after the day Joshua walked into Lee's office, the latter said, "The four men who are going with the rocket. You've selected them?"

"Yes. They're waiting for the day. It was a long slow process, selecting the best equipped men."

"Bring them here tomorrow afternoon."

"I'll check with them. If they all can't make it, would a later date —?"

"I said tomorrow. See to it they can make it."

"Yes, Lee."

Joshua brought the four young men to Lee Gorman's office the following day. Lee had a buffet table set up. He was the smiling, genial, expansive host. "Sit down gentlemen. I'm glad of this opportunity to meet you."

There were five chairs in the room. Gorman had already seated himself. The young men hesitated.

"Sit down, sit down."

They dropped into the chair, glancing uneasily at Joshua Lake. Joshua turned and started toward the door.

"Don't go, Lake. I'm sure the boys would like a drink. You'll find the fixing on the buffet. Why don't you take their orders?"

The crowning insult, Joshua wondered. The last, crude insult? Lee Gorman's wounds must have been deep indeed. Joshua served drinks, brought sandwiches. Lee Gorman's geniality kept the awk-

wardness of the situation from bringing it to a complete standstill. "Well, Thursday is the day, I understand. How do you feel about it? Rocketing off into space. Becoming a part of the big tomorrow." Gorman's eyes caught those of Joshua Lake as he spoke the last sentence. There was laughter behind them.

The crew of the Moon rocket left shortly afterward. Joshua was the last to walk from the room. Just as he was going through the door, Lee Gorman whispered into his ear. "You can't be sure there'll be a rocket flight. I might stop it the last minute. I haven't made up my mind yet."

Joshua turned and looked at his tormentor in silence. The others had gone on down the hall. Gorman laughed and said, "I suppose that's a problem you'll face when you come to it?"

"Yes — when I come to it."

Alone in his office, Lee Gorman strode angrily to the buffet. With a sweep of his arm, he knocked a liquor bottle across the room. The motivation of the act was hard to determine, however, from Gorman's outward appearance. It could have bitter disappointment or a fierce joy.

Joshua Lake walked into Lee Gorman's office, removed his hat and said, "With your permission, this is the day."

"What time?"

"It translates into 4:07 and 30 seconds, Greenwich time."

Gorman scowled. "I suppose you've arranged quite a party."

"Nothing too spectacular. We'll leave for the blasting pits at 3:00 o'clock. I'd be honored if you'd ride with me."

"Do you still own a car?"

"A small one. Its value is negligible."

"We'll go in one of mine. Be here at five minutes to three."

"Certainly." Joshua put his hat on and walked out. . . .

They rode across the Nevada desert in a black Cadillac with the chauffeur sitting at attention and staring straight ahead. Joshua stared straight ahead also. He asked, "Are you going to stop the flight?"

Beside him, leaning forward, clutching with both hands, the silver knob on a black mahogany cane, Gorman replied, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

A dot on the desert expanded into a pit, a tower, and some small buildings. The car followed the ruts of the tractors that had hauled the rocket to the launching site, and came to a halt. "That small, glass encased platform," Joshua said. "We'll view the proceedings from there."

Gorman snorted. "I'll view them from where I please."

They were standing beside the car, Joshua slightly behind his benefactor. "From the platform."

Gorman scowled and half turned. "What are you doing?"

"I'm holding a gun against your back. It is a very small gun. No one can see it and it probably wouldn't kill you. Then again, it might. We will walk to the platform and stand together to watch the blast-off."

"You'd actually — *kill*, to get that ship into the air?"

"If I committed murder, I would certainly regret it the rest of my life, but the rocket must be launched."

They stood in the glass enclosure on the platform and no one came near them. Several people veered close and waved. Joshua waved back with his free hand and the people went on their way.

An hour passed. There was vast



"It's really surprising how civilized they are."

activity on the field. Gorman said, "I'm tired. I want to sit down."

"It was thoughtless of me. I should have provided chairs. It won't be long now."

It wasn't long. Five minutes later there was a roar, an explosion of color, and a silver rocket flash up into the sky almost faster than the eye could follow.

Gorman slammed the heel of his hand against the side of his head in order to restore hearing. "You can put that gun away."

"Of course. And you'll want to call the police."

Gorman growled like an annoyed bull. He jerked open the door and strode away.

Three hours later, Joshua and Myra Lake were seated in the small patio beside their home. They were seated very close together, and Myra was stroking Joshua's hand. "It's been a long time, dear; a very long time."

"Yes."

"Are you happy?"

"I'm — well, satisfied — at least partially. We've passed a big milestone. But it isn't over yet."

"You're sure this time, though?"

"Very sure."

"Thank heaven we won't have much longer to wait."

The wait was slightly less than ten minutes. Then Lee Gorman strode into the patio. Joshua sprang to his feet. "Any news?"

"Yes."

"Then they should have phoned

me. I left word to be called."

"No one could get up the courage. The rocket crashed in Canada."

Joshua swayed. When he looked at Lee, his eyes were filled with a mute plea. "That is the truth?"

"It's the truth. The first flash said it appears the tail broke off in high space."

Joshua sank into his chair. "The crew — died?"

"Four more men sacrificed to your —" Gorman stopped and did not use the word *obsession*. There was too much agony in Joshua's face. "I'm taking the plant — I'm taking everything. I've got to. I've paid for them."

Lee Gorman walked from the patio. His steps echoed and died.

Joshua and Myra sat for a long time in silence. Myra was holding his hand. Finally she spoke. "Well, at least it's over. Now you can rest. Successful or not — you've earned it."

Joshua turned and looked into her face — looked at her as though she had just entered. "Oh no, my dear. You certainly don't expect me to —"

"Joshua!"

"Why I'm only sixty-three. I never felt better in my life. I have a lot of good productive years ahead."

"Joshua! What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to be the first man to send a rocket to the Moon."

BESIDE STILL WATERS

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

When people talk about getting away from it all, they are usually thinking about our great open spaces out west. But to science fiction writers, that would be practically in the heart of Times Square. When a man of the future wants solitude he picks a slab of rock floating in space four light years east of Andromeda. Here is a gentle little story about a man who sought the solitude of such a location. And who did he take along for company? None other than Charles the Robot.

MARK ROGERS was a prospector, and he went to the asteroid belt looking for radioactives and rare metals. He searched for years, never finding much, hopping from fragment to fragment. After a time he settled on a slab of rock half a mile thick.

Rogers had been born old, and he didn't age much past a point. His face was white with the pallor of space, and his hands shook a

little. He called his slab of rock Martha, after no girl he had ever known.

He made a little strike, enough to equip Martha with an air pump and a shack, a few tons of dirt and some water tanks, and a robot. Then he settled back and watched the stars.

The robot he bought was a standard-model all-around worker, with built-in memory and a thirty-word vocabulary. Mark

added to that, bit by bit. He was something of a tinkerer, and he enjoyed adapting his environment to himself.

At first, all the robot could say was "Yes sir," and "No sir." He could state simple problems: "The air pump is laboring, sir." "The corn is budding, sir." He could perform a satisfactory salutation: "Good morning, sir."

Mark changed that. He eliminated the "sirs" from the robot's vocabulary; equality was the rule on Mark's hunk of rock. Then he dubbed the robot Charles, after a father he had never known.

As the years passed, the air pump began to labor a little as it converted the oxygen in the planetoid's rock into a breathable atmosphere. The air seeped into space, and the pump worked a little harder, supplying more.

The crops continued to grow on the tamed black dirt of the planetoid. Looking up, Mark could see the sheer blackness of the river of space, the floating points of the stars. Around him, under him, overhead, masses of rock drifted, and sometimes the starlight glistened from their black sides. Occasionally, Mark caught a glimpse of Mars or Jupiter. Once he thought he saw Earth.

Mark began to tape new responses into Charles. He added simple responses to cue words. When he said, "How does it look?" Charles would answer,

"Oh, pretty good, I guess."

At first the answers were what Mark had been answering himself, in the long dialogue held over the years. But, slowly, he began to build a new personality into Charles.

Mark had always been suspicious and scornful of women. But for some reason he didn't tape the same suspicion into Charles. Charles' outlook was quite different.

"What do you think of girls?" Mark would ask, sitting on a packing case outside the shack, after the chores were done.

"Oh, I don't know. You have to find the right one." The robot would reply dutifully, repeating what had been put on its tape.

"I never saw a good one yet," Mark would say.

"Well, that's not fair. Perhaps you didn't look long enough. There's a girl in the world for every man."

"You're a romantic!" Mark would say scornfully. The robot would pause—a built-in pause—and chuckle a carefully constructed chuckle.

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once," Charles would say. "Maybe if I would have looked, I would have found her."

And then it would be bedtime. Or perhaps Mark would want more conversation. "What do you think of girls?" he would ask



again, and the discussion would follow its same course.

Charles grew old. His limbs lost their flexibility, and some of his wiring started, to corrode. Mark would spend hours keeping the robot in repair.

"You're getting rusty," he would cackle.

"You're not so young yourself," Charles would reply. He had an answer for almost everything. Nothing involved, but an answer.

It was always night on Martha, but Mark broke up his time into mornings, afternoons and evenings. Their life followed a simple routine. Breakfast, from vegetables and Mark's canned store. Then the robot would work in the fields, and the plants grew used to his touch. Mark would repair the pump, check the water supply, and straighten up the immaculate shack. Lunch, and the robot's chores were usually finished.

The two would sit on the packing case and watch the stars. They would talk until supper, and sometimes late into the endless night.

In time, Mark built more complicated conversations into Charles. He couldn't give the robot free choice, of course, but he managed a pretty close approximation of it. Slowly, Charles' personality emerged. But it was

strikingly different from Mark's.

Where Mark was querulous, Charles was calm. Mark was sardonic, Charles was naive. Mark was a cynic, Charles was an idealist. Mark was often sad; Charles was forever content.

And in time, Mark forgot he had built the answers into Charles. He accepted the robot as a friend, of about his own age. A friend of long years standing.

"The thing I don't understand," Mark would say, "is why a man like you wants to live here. I mean, it's all right for me. No one cares about me, and I never gave much of a damn about anyone. But why you?"

"Here I have a whole world," Charles would reply, "where on Earth I had to share with billions. I have the stars, bigger and brighter than on Earth. I have all space around me, close, like still waters. And I have you, Mark."

"Now, don't go getting sentimental on me —"

"I'm not. Friendship counts. Love was lost long ago, Mark. The love of a girl named Martha, whom neither of us ever met. And that's a pity. But friendship remains, and the eternal night."

"You're a bloody poet," Mark would say, half admiringly. "A poor poet."

Time passed unnoticed by the stars, and the air pump hissed

and clanked and leaked. Mark was fixing it constantly, but the air of Martha became increasingly rare. Although Charles labored in the fields, the crops, deprived of sufficient air, died.

Mark was tired now, and barely able to crawl around, even without the grip of gravity. He stayed in his bunk most of the time. Charles fed him as best he could, moving on rusty, creaking limbs.

"What do you think of girls?"

"I never saw a good one yet."

"Well, that's not fair."

Mark was too tired to see the end coming, and Charles wasn't interested. But the end was on its way. The air pump threatened to give out momentarily. There hadn't been any food for days.

"But why you?" Gasping in

the escaping air. Strangling.

"Here I have a whole world —"

"Don't get sentimental —"

"And the love of a girl named Martha."

From his bunk Mark saw the stars for the last time. Big, bigger than ever, endlessly floating in the still waters of space.

"The stars . . ." Mark said.

"Yes?"

"The sun?"

"— shall shine as now."

"A bloody poet."

"A poor poet."

"And girls?"

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once. Maybe if —"

"What do you think of girls? And stars? And Earth?" And it was bedtime, this time forever.

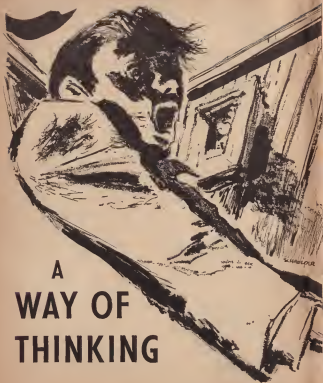
Charles stood beside the body of his friend. He felt for a pulse once, and allowed the withered hand to fall. He walked to a corner of the shack and turned off the tired air pump.

The tape that Mark had prepared had a few cracked inches left to run. "I hope he finds his Martha," the robot croaked, and then the tape broke.

His rusted limbs would not bend, and he stood frozen, staring back at the naked stars. Then he bowed his head.

"The Lord is my shepherd," Charles said. "I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me . . ."





A WAY OF THINKING

What's to say about a story by Ted Sturgeon except that the by-line itself is all many people need to shell out the price of the magazine and head straight for an easy chair. So all we'll say is that this one is by Sturgeon and that it's about voodoo. You don't like to read stories about voodoo? Well, neither do we, but wait up, chum. This is Sturgeon voodoo. That makes it an entirely different thing. You're in for a rare treat.

I'LL have to start with an anecdote or two that you may have heard from me before, but they'll bear repeating, since it's Kelley we're talking about.

I shipped out with Kelley when I was a kid. Tankships, mostly coastwise: load somewhere in the oil country — New Orleans, Aransas Pass, Port Arthur, or some such, and unload at ports north of Hatteras. Eight days out, eighteen hours in, give or take a day or six hours. Kelley was ordinary seaman on my watch, which was a laugh; he knew more about the sea than anyone aft of the bridge. But he never ribbed me, stumbling around the place with my blue A.B. ticket. He had a sense of humor in his peculiar quiet way, but he never gratified it by proofs of the obvious — that he was twice the seaman I could ever be.



There were a lot of unusual things about Kelley, the way he looked, the way he moved; but most unusual was the way he thought. He was like one of those extra-terrestrials you read about, who can think as well as a human being but not *like* a human being. Just for example, there was that night in Port Arthur. I was sitting in a honkytonk up over a bar with a red-headed girl called Red, trying to mind my own business while watching a chick known as Boots, who sat alone over by the jukebox. This girl Boots was watching the door and grinding her teeth, and I knew why, and I was worried. See, Kelley had been seeing her pretty regularly, but this trip he'd made the break and word was around that he was romancing a girl in Pete's place — a very unpopular kind of rumor for Boots to be chewing on. I also knew that Kelley would be along any minute because he'd promised to meet me here.

And in he came, running up that long straight flight of steps easy as a cat, and when he got in the door everybody just hushed, except the juke-box, and it sounded scared.

Now, just over Boots's shoulder on a little shelf was an electric fan. It had sixteen-inch blades and no guard. The very second Kelley's face showed in the doorway Boots rose up like a snake out of a basket, reached behind her, snatched

that fan off the shelf and threw it.

It might as well have been done with a slow-motion camera as far as Kelley was concerned. He didn't move his feet at all. He bent sideways, just a little, from the waist, and turned his wide shoulders. Very clearly I heard three of those whining blade-tips touch a button on his shirt *bip-bip-bip!* and then the fan hit the doorpost.

Even the juke-box shut up then. It was so quiet. Kelley didn't say anything and neither did anyone else.

Now, if you believe in do-as-you-get-done-to, and someone heaves an infernal machine at you, you'll pick it right up and heave it back. But Kelley doesn't think like you. He didn't even look at the fan.

He just watched Boots, and she was white and crazed-looking, waiting for whatever he might have in mind.

He went across the room to her, fast but not really hurrying, and he picked her out from behind that table, and he threw her.

He threw her at the fan.

She hit the floor and slid, sweeping up the fan where it lay, hitting the doorjamb with her head, spinning out into the stairway. Kelley walked after her, stepped over her, went on downstairs and back to the ship.

And there was the time we

shipped a new main spur gear for the starboard winch. The deck engineer used up the whole morning watch trying to get the old gear-wheel off its shaft. He heated the hub. He pounded it. He put in wedges. He hooked on with a handybilly — that's a four-sheave block-and-tackle to you — and all he did with that was break a U-bolt.

Then Kelley came on deck, rubbing sleep out of his eyes, and took one brief look. He walked over to the winch, snatched up a crescent wrench, and relieved the four bolts that held the housing tight around the shaft. He then picked up a twelve-pound maul, hefted it, and swung it just once. The maul hit the end of the shaft and the shaft shot out of the other side of the machine like a torpedo out of its tube. The gearwheel fell down on the deck. Kelley went

forward to take the helm and thought no more about it, while the deck crew stared after him, wall-eyed. You see what I mean? Problem: Get a wheel off a shaft. But in Kelley's book it's: Get the shaft out of the wheel.

I kibitzed him at poker one time and saw him discard two pair and draw a winning straight flush. Why that discard? Because he'd just realized the deck was stacked. Why the flush? God knows. All Kelley did was pick up the pot — a big one — grin at the sharper, and quit the game.

I have plenty more yarns like that, but you get the idea. The guy had a special way of thinking, that's all, and it never failed him.

I lost track of Kelley. I came to regret that now and then; he made a huge impression on me, and some times I used to think about him when I had a tough problem



to solve. What would Kelley do? And sometimes it helped, and sometimes it didn't; and when it didn't, I guess it was because I'm not Kelley.

I came ashore and got married and did all sorts of other things, and the years went by, and a war came and went, and one warm spring evening I went into a place I know on West 48th St. because I felt like drinking *tequila* and I can always get it there. And who should be sitting in a booth finishing up a big Mexican dinner but — no, not Kelley.

It was Milton. He looks like a college sophomore with money. His suits are always cut just so, but quiet; and when he's relaxed he looks as if he's just been tagged and it matters to him, and when he's worried you want to ask him has he been cutting classes again. It happens he's a damn good doctor.

He was worried, but he gave me a good hello and waved me into the booth while he finished up. We had small talk and I tried to buy him a drink. He looked real wistful and then shook his head. "Patient in ten minutes," he said, looking at his watch.

"Then it's nearby. Come back afterward."

"Better yet," he said, getting up, "come with me. This might interest you, come to think of it."

He got his hat and paid Rudy, and I said "*Laego*," and Rudy

grinned and slapped the *tequila* bottle. Nice place, Rudy's.

"What about the patient?" I asked as we turned up the avenue. I thought for a while he hadn't heard me, but at last he said, "Four busted ribs and a compound femoral. Minor internal haemorrhage which might or might not be a ruptured spleen. Necrosis of the oral frenum — or was while there was any frenum left."

"What's a frenum?"

"That little strip of tissue under your tongue."

"Ongk," I said, trying to reach it with the tip of my tongue. "What a healthy fellow."

"Pulmonary adhesions," Milton ruminated. "Not serious, certainly not tubercular. But they hurt and they bleed and I don't like 'em. And acne rosacea."

"That's the nose like a stop-light, isn't it?"

"It isn't as funny as that to the guy that has it."

I was quelled. "What was it — a goon-squad?"

He shook his head.

"A truck?"

"No."

"He fell off something?"

Milton stopped and turned and looked me straight in the eye. "No," he said. "Nothing like that. Nothing like anything. Nothing," he said, walking again, "at all."

I said nothing to that because there was nothing to say.

"He just went to bed," said

Milton thoughtfully, "because he felt off his oats. And one by one these things happened to him."

"In bed?"

"Well," said Milton, in a to-be-absolutely-accurate tone, "when the ribs broke he was on his way back from the bathroom."

"You're kidding."

"No I'm not."

"He's lying."

Milton said, "I believe him."

I know Milton. There's no doubt that he believed the man. I said, "I keep reading things about psychosomatic disorders. But a broken — what did you say it was?"

"Femur. Thigh, that is. Compound. Oh, it's rare, all right. But it can happen, has happened. Those muscles are pretty powerful, you know. They deliver two-fifty, three hundred pound thrusts every time you walk up stairs. In certain spastic hysterics, they'll break bones easily enough."

"What about all those other things?"

"Functional disorders, every one of 'em. No germ disease."

"Now this boy," I said, "*really* has something on his mind."

"Yes, I suppose he has."

But I didn't ask what. I could hear the discussion closing as if it had a spring latch on it.

We went into a door tucked between store-fronts and climbed three flights. Milton put out his hand to a bell-push and then

dropped it without ringing. There was a paper tacked to the door.

DOC I WENT FOR SHOTS
COME ON IN.

It was unsigned. Milton turned the knob and we went in.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. Not too strong, but not the kind of thing you ever forget if you ever had to dig a slit-trench through last week's burial pit. "That's the necrosis," muttered Milton. "Damn it." He gestured. "Hang your hat over there. Sit down. I'll be out soon." He went into an inner room, saying, "Hi, Hal," at the doorway. From inside came an answering rumble, and something twisted in my throat to hear it, for no voice which is that tired should sound that cheerful.

I sat watching the wallpaper and laboriously un-listening those clinical grunts and the gay-weary responses in the other room. The wallpaper was awful. I remember a night-club act where Reginald Gardiner used to give sound-effect renditions of wallpaper designs. This one, I decided, would run "Body to *weep* . . . yawp yawp; body to *weep* . . . yawp, yawp;" very faintly, with the final syllable a straining retch. I had just reached a particularly clumsy join where the paper utterly demolished its own rhythm and went "Yawp yawpbody to *weep*" when the outer door opened and I leaped

to my feet with the rush of utter guilt one feels when caught in an unlikely place with no curt and lucid explanation.

He was two long strides into the room, tall, and soft-footed, his face and long green eyes quite at rest, when he saw me. He stopped as if on leaf-springs and shock absorbers, not suddenly, completely controlled, and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'll be damned," I answered. "Kelley!"

He peered at me with precisely the expression I had seen so many times when he watched the little square windows on the one-arm bandits we used to play together. I could almost hear the tumblers, see the drums stop; not lemon . . . cherry . . . cherry . . . and *click!* this time but tankship . . . Texas . . . him! . . . and *click!* "I be goddam," he drawled, to indicate that he was even more surprised than I was. He transferred the small package he carried from his right hand to his left and shook hands. His hand went once and a half times around mine with enough left over to tie a half-hitch. "Where in time you been keepin' yourse'f? How'd you smoke me out?"

"I never," I said. (Saying it, I was aware that I always fell into the idiom of people who impressed me, to the exact degree of that impression. So I always found myself talking more like

Kelley than Kelley's shaving mirror.) I was grinning so wide my face hurt. "I'm glad to see you." I shook hands with him again, foolishly. "I came with the doctor."

"You a doctor now?" he said, his tone prepared for wonders.

"I'm a writer," I said deprecatingly.

"Yeah, I heard," he reminded himself. His eyes narrowed; as of old, it had the effect of sharp-focussing a searchlight beam. "I heard!" he repeated, with deeper interest. "Stories. Gremlins and flyin' saucers an' all like that." I nodded. He said, without insult, "Hell of a way to make a living."

"What about you?"

"Ships. Some drydock. Tank cleaning. Compass 'djustin'. For a while had a job holdin' a insurance inspector's head. You know."

I glanced at the big hands that could weld or steer or compute certainly with the excellence I used to know, and marvelled that he found himself so unremarkable. I pulled myself back to here-and-now and nodded toward the inner room. "I'm holding you up."

"No you ain't. Milton, he knows what he's doin'. He wants me, he'll holler."

"Who's sick?"

His face darkened like the sea in scud-weather, abruptly and deep down. "My brother." He looked at me searchingly. "He's . . ." Then he seemed to check himself. "He's sick," he said un-

necessarily, and added quickly, "He's going to be all right, though."

"Sure," I said quickly.

I had the feeling that we were both lying and that neither of us knew why.

Milton came out, laughing a laugh that cut off as soon as he was out of range of the sick man. Kelley turned to him slowly, as if slowness were the only alternative to leaping on the doctor, pounding the news out of him. "Hello, Kelley. Heard you come in."

"How is he, Doc?"

Milton looked up quickly, his bright round eyes clashing with Kelley's slitted fierce ones. "You got to take it easy, Kelley. What'll happen to him if you crack up?"

"Nobody's cracking up. What do you want me to do?"

Milton saw the package on the table. He picked it up and opened it. There was a leather case and two phials. "Ever use one of these before?"

"He was a pre-med before he went to sea," I said suddenly.

Milton stared at me. "You two know each other?"

I looked at Kelley. "Sometimes I think I invented him."

Kelley snorted and thumped my shoulder. Happily I had one hand on a built-in china shelf. His big hand continued the motion and took the hypodermic case from the doctor. "Sterilize the shaft and needle," he said sleepily, as if read-

ing. "Assemble without touching needle with fingers. To fill, puncture diaphragm and withdraw plunger. Squirt upward to remove air an' prevent embolism. Locate major vein in —"

Milton laughed. "Okay, okay. But forget the vein. Any place will do — it's subcutaneous, that's all. I've written the exact amounts to be used for exactly the symptoms you can expect. Don't jump the gun, Kelley. And remember how you salt your stew. Just because a little is good, it doesn't figure that a lot has to be better."

Kelley was wearing that sleepy inattention which, I remembered, meant only that he was taking in every single word like a tape recorder. He tossed the leather case gently, caught it. "Now?" he said.

"Not now," the doctor said positively. "Only when you have to."

Kelley seemed frustrated. I suddenly understood that he wanted to do something, build something, fight something. Anything but sit and wait for therapy to bring results. I said, "Kelley, any brother of yours is a — well, you know, I'd like to say hello, if it's all —"

Immediately and together Kelley and the doctor said loudly, "Sure, when he's on his feet," and "Better not just now, I've just given him a sedat —" And together they stopped awkwardly.

"Let's get that drink," I said

before they could flounder any more.

"Now you're talking. You too, Kelley. It'll do you good."

"Not me," said Kelley. "Hal —"

"I knocked him out," said the doctor bluntly. "You'll chuck around scratching for worms and looking for hawks till you wake him up, and he needs his sleep. Come on."

Painfully I had to add to my many mental images of Kelley the very first one in which he was indecisive. I hated it.

"Well," said Kelley, "let me go see."

He disappeared. I looked at Milton's face, and turned quickly away. I was sure he wouldn't want me to see that expression of sick pity and bafflement.

Kelley came out, moving silently as always. "Yeah, asleep," he said. "For how long?"

"I'd say four hours at least."

"Well all right." From the old-fashioned clothes-tree he took a battered black engineer's cap with a shiny, crazed patent-leather visor. I laughed. Both men turned to me, with annoyance, I thought.

On the landing outside I explained. "The hat," I said. "Remember? Tampico?"

"Oh," he grunted. He thwacked it against his forearm.

"He left it on the bar of this ginmill," I told Milton. "We got back to the gangplank and he missed it. Nothing would do but

he has to go back for it, so I went with him."

"You was wearin' a *teguile* label on your face," Kelley said. "Kept tryin' to tell the taximan you was a bottle."

"He didn't speak English."

Kelley flashed something like his old grin. "He got the idea."

"Anyway," I told Milton, "the place was closed when we got there. We tried the front door and the side doors and they were locked like Alcatraz. We made so much racket I guess if anyone was inside they were afraid to open up. We could see Kelley's hat in there on the bar. Nobody's *about* to steal that hat."

"It's a good hat," he said in an injured tone.

"Kelley goes into action," I said. "Kelley don't think like other people, you know, Milt. He squints through the window at the other wall, goes around the building, sets one foot against the corner stud, gets his fingers under the edge of that corrugated iron siding they use. 'I'll pry this out a bit,' he says. 'You slide in and get my hat.'"

"Corrugated was only nailed on one-by-twos," said Kelley.

"He gives one almighty pull," I chuckled, "and the whole damn side falls out of the building. I mean the second floor too. You never heard such a clap-o'-thunder in your life."

"I got my hat," said Kelley. He



uttered two syllables of a laugh. "Whole second floor was a you-know-what, an' the one single stairway come out with the wall."

"Taxi driver just took off. But he left his taxi. Kelley drove back. I couldn't. I was laughing."

"You was drunk."

"Well, *some*," I said.

We walked together, quietly, happily. Out of Kelley's sight, Milton thumped me gently on the ribs. It was eloquent and it pleased me. It said that it was a long time since Kelley had laughed. It was a long time since he had thought about anything but Hal.

I guess we felt it equally when, with no trace of humor . . . more, as if he had let my episode just blow itself out until he could be heard . . . Kelley said, "Doc, what's with the hand?"

"It'll be all right," Milton said.

"You put splints."

Milton sighed. "All right, all right. Three fractures. Two on the middle finger and one on the ring."

Kelley said, "I saw they was swollen."

I looked at Kelley's face and I

looked at Milton's, and I didn't like either, and I wished to God I were somewhere else, in a uranium mine maybe, or making out my income tax. I said, "Here we are. Ever been to Rudy's, Kelley?"

He looked up at the little yellow-and-red marquee. "No."

"Come on," I said. "*Tequila*."

We went in and got a booth. Kelley ordered beer. I got mad then and started to call him some things I'd picked up on waterfronts from here to Tierra de Fuego. Milton stared wall-eyed at me and Kelley stared at his hands. After a while Milton began to jot some of it down on a prescription pad he took from his pocket. I was pretty proud.

Kelley gradually got the idea. If I wanted to pick up the tab and he wouldn't let me, his habits were those of *uno puñeto sin cojones* (which a Spanish dictionary will reliably misinform you means "a weakling without eggs") and his affections for his forebears were powerful but irreverent. I won, and soon he was lapping up

a huge combination plate of beef *tostadas*, chicken *enchiladas*, and pork *tacos*. He endeared himself to Rudy by demanding salt and lemon with his *tequila* and despatching same with flawless ritual: hold the lemon between left thumb and forefinger, lick the back of the left hand, sprinkle salt on the wet spot, lift the *tequila* with the right, lick the salt, drink the *tequila*, bite the lemon. Soon he was imitating the German second mate we shipped out of Puerto Barrios one night, who ate fourteen green bananas and lost them and all his teeth over the side, in gummed gutturals which had us roaring.

But after that question about fractured fingers back there in the street, Milton and I weren't fooled any more, and though everyone tried hard and it was a fine try, none of the laughter went deep enough or stayed long enough, and I wanted to cry.

We all had a huge hunk of the nesselrode pie made by Rudy's beautiful blond wife — pie you can blow off your plate by flapping a napkin . . . sweet smoke with calories. And then Kelley demanded to know what time it was and cussed and stood up.

"It's only been two hours," Milton said.

"I just as soon head home all the same," said Kelley. "Thanks."

"Wait," I said. I got a scrap of paper out of my wallet and wrote on it. "Here's my phone. I want

to see you some more. I'm working for myself these days; my time's my own. I don't sleep much, so call me any time you feel like it."

He took the paper. "You're no good," he said. "You never were no good." The way he said it, I felt fine.

"On the corner is a newsstand," I told him. "There's a magazine there called *Amazing* with one of my lousy stories in it."

"They print it on a roll?" he demanded. He waved at us, nodded to Rudy, and went out.

I swept up some spilled sugar on the table top and pushed it around until it was a perfect square. After a while I shoved in the sides until it was a lozenge. Milton didn't say anything either. Rudy, as is his way, had sense enough to stay away from us.

"Well, that did him some good," Milton said after a while.

"You know better than that," I said bitterly.

Milton said patiently, "Kelley thinks we think it did him some good. And thinking that does him good."

I had to smile at that contortion, and after that it was easier to talk. "The kid going to live?"

Milton waited, as if another answer might spring from somewhere, but it didn't. He said, "No."

"Fine doctor."

"Don't!" he snapped. He looked

up at me. "Look, if this was one of those — well, say pleurisy cases on the critical list, without the will to live, why I'd know what to do. Usually those depressed cases have such a violent desire to be reassured, down deep, that you can snap 'em right out of it if only you can think of the right thing to say. And you usually can. But Hal's not one of those. He wants to live. If he didn't want so much to live he'd've been dead three weeks ago. What's killing him is sheer somatic trauma — one broken bone after another, one failing or inflamed internal organ after another."

"Who's doing it?"

"Damn it, *nobody's* doing it!" He caught me biting my lip. "If either one of us should say Kelley's doing it, the other one will punch him in the mouth. Right?"

"Right."

"Just so that doesn't have to happen," said Milton carefully. "I'll tell you what you're bound to ask me in a minute: why isn't he in a hospital?"

"Okay, why?"

"He was. For weeks. And all the time he was there these things kept on happening to him, only worse. More, and more often. I got him home as soon as it was safe to get him out of traction for that broken thigh. He's much better off with Kelley. Kelley keeps him cheered up, cooks for him, medi-

cates him — the works. It's all Kelley does these days."

"I figured. It must be getting pretty tough."

"It is. I wish I had your ability with invective. You can't lend that man anything, give him anything . . . proud? God!"

"Don't take this personally, but have you had consultation?"

He shrugged. "Six ways from the mickle. And nine-tenths of it behind Kelley's back, which isn't easy. The lies I've told him! Hal's just got to have a special kind of Persian melon that someone is receiving in a little store in Vonkers. Out Kelley goes, and in the meantime I have to corral two or three doctors and whip 'em in to see Hal and out again before Kelley gets back. Or Hal has to have a special prescription, and I fix up with the druggist to take a good two hours compounding it. Hal saw Grundage, the osteo man, that way, but poor old Ancelewicz the pharmacist got punched in the chops for the delay."

"Milton, you're all right."

He snarled at me, and then went on quietly. "None of it's done any good. I've learned a whole encyclopedia full of wise words and some therapeutic tricks I didn't know existed. But . . ." He shook his head. "Do you know why Kelley and I wouldn't let you meet Hal?" He wet his lips and cast about for an example. "Remember the pictures of Musso-

lini's corpse after the mob got through with it?"

I shuddered. "I saw 'em."

"Well, that's what he looks like, only he's alive, which doesn't make it any prettier. Hal doesn't know how bad it is, and neither Kelley nor I would run the risk of having him see it reflected in someone else's face. I wouldn't send a wooden Indian into that room."

I began to pound the table, barely touching it, hitting it harder and harder until Milton caught my wrist. I froze then, unhappily conscious of the eyes of everyone on the place looking at me. Gradually the normal sound of the restaurant resumed. "Sorry."

"It's all right."

"There's got to be some sort of reason!"

His lips twitched in a small acid smile. "That's what you get down to at last, isn't it? There's always been a reason for everything, and if we don't know it, we can find it out. But just one single example of real unreason is enough to shake our belief in everything. And then the fear gets bigger than the case at hand and extends to a whole universe of concepts labelled 'unproven'. Shows you how little we believe in anything, basically."

"That's a miserable piece of philosophy!"

"Sure. If you have another arrival point for a case like this, I'll buy it with a bonus. Meantime

I'll just go on worrying at this one and feeling more scared than I ought to."

"Let's get drunk."

"A wonderful idea."

Neither of us ordered. We just sat there looking at the lozenge of sugar I'd made on the table-top. After a while I said, "Hasn't Kelley any idea of what's wrong?"

"You know Kelley. If he had an idea he'd be working on it. All he's doing is sitting by watching his brother's body stew and swell like yeast in a vat."

"What about Hal?"

"He isn't lucid much any more. Not if I can help it."

"But maybe he —"

"Look," said Milton, "I don't want to sound cranky or anything, but I can't hold still for a lot of questions like . . ." He stopped, took out his display handkerchief, looked at it, put it away. "I'm sorry. You don't seem to understand that I didn't take this case yesterday afternoon. I've been sweating it out for nearly three months now. I've already thought of everything you're going to think of. Yes, I questioned Hal, back and forth and sideways. Nothing. N-n-nothing."

That last word trailed off in such a peculiar way that I looked up abruptly. "Tell me," I demanded.

"Tell you what?" Suddenly he looked at his watch. I covered it with my hand. "Come on, Milt."

"I don't know what you're — damn it, leave me alone, will you? If it was anything important, I'd've chased it down long ago."

"Tell me the unimportant something."

"No."

"Tell me why you won't tell me."

"Damn you, I'll do that. It's because you're a crackpot. You're a nice guy and I like you, but you're a crackpot." He laughed suddenly, and it hit me like the flare of a flashlight. "I didn't know you could look so astonished!" he said. "Now take it easy and listen to me. A guy comes out of a steak house and steps on a rusty nail, and ups and dies of tetanus. But your crackpot vegetarian will swear up and down that the man would still be alive if he hadn't poisoned his system with meat, and use the death to prove his point. The perennial Dry will call the same casualty a victim of John Barleycorn if he knows the man had a beer with his steak. This one death can be ardently and wholeheartedly be blamed on the man's divorce, his religion, his political affiliations or on a hereditary taint from his great-great-grandfather who worked for Oliver Cromwell. You're a nice guy and I like you," he said again, "and I am not going to sit across from you and watch you do the crackpot act."

"I do not know," I said slowly and distinctly, "what the hell you are talking about. And now you have to tell me."

"I suppose so," he said sadly. He drew a deep breath. "You believe what you write. No," he said quickly, "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. You grind out all this fantasy and horror stuff and you believe every word of it. More basically, you'd rather believe in the outré and the so-called 'unknowable' than in what I'd call *real* things. You think I'm talking through my hat."

"I do," I said, "but go ahead."

"If I called you up tomorrow and told you with great joy that they'd isolated a virus for Hal's condition and a serum was on the way, you'd be just as happy about it as I would be, but way down deep you'd wonder if that was what was really wrong with him, or if the serum is what really cured him. If on the other hand I admitted to you that I'd found two small punctures on Hal's throat and a wisp of fog slipping out of the room — by God! see what I mean? You have a gleam in your eye already!"

I covered my eyes. "Don't let me stop you now," I said coldly. "Since you are not going to admit Dracula's punctures, what are you going to admit?"

"A year ago Kelley gave his brother a present. An ugly little brute of a Haitian doll. Hal kept

it around to make faces at for a while and then gave it to a girl. He had had trouble with the girl. She hates him — really hates him. As far as anyone knows she still has the doll. Are you happy now?"

"Happy," I said disgustedly. "But Milt — you're not just ignoring this doll thing. Why, that could easily be the whole basis of . . . hey, sit down! Where are you going?"

"I told you I wouldn't sit across from a damn lobbyist. Enter hobbies, exit reason." He recoiled. "Wait — you sit down now."

I gathered up a handful of his well-cut lapels. "We'll both sit down," I said gently, "or I'll prove to your heart's desire that I've reached the end of reason."

"Yessir," he said good-naturedly, and sat down. I felt like a damn fool. The twinkle left his eyes and he leaned forward. "Perhaps now you'll listen instead of riding off like that. I suppose you know that in many cases the voodoo doll does work, and you know why?"

"Well, yes. I didn't think you'd admit it." I got no response from his stony gaze, and at last realized that a fantasist's pose of authority on such matters is bound to sit ill with a serious and progressive physician. A lot less positively, I said, "It comes down to a matter of subjective reality, or what some people call faith. If you believe firmly that the mutilation of a doll with which you identify your-

self will result in your own mutilation, well, that's what will happen."

"That, and a lot of things even a horror-story writer could find out if he researched anywhere except in his projective imagination. For example, there are Arabs in North Africa today whom you dare not insult in any way really important to them. If they feel injured, they'll threaten to die, and if you call the bluff they'll sit down, cover their heads, and damn well *die*. There are psychosomatic phenomena like the stigmata, or wounds of the cross, which appear from time to time on the hands, feet and breasts of exceptionally devout people. I know you know a lot of this," he added abruptly, apparently reading something in my expression, "but I'm not going to get my knee off your chest



"Scalpel — sponge — band-aid —"

until you'll admit that I'm at least capable of taking a thing like this into consideration and tracking it down."

"I never saw you before in my life," I said, and in an important way I meant it.

"Good," he said, with considerable relief. "Now I'll tell you what I did. I jumped at this doll episode almost as wildly as you did. It came late in the questioning because apparently it *really didn't matter* to Hal."

"Oh, well, but the subconscious —"

"Shaddup!" He stuck a surprisingly sharp forefinger into my collarbone. "I'm telling you; you're not telling me. I won't disallow that a deep belief in voodoo might be hidden in Hal's subconscious, but if it is, it's where sodium amytal and word association and light and profound hypnosis and a half-dozen other therapies give not a smidgin of evidence. I'll take that as proof that he carries no such conviction. I guess from the looks of you I'll have to remind you again that I've dug into this thing in more ways for longer and with more tools than you have — and I doubt that it means any less to me than it does to you."

"You know, I'm just going to shut up," I said plaintively.

"High time," he said, and grinned. "Now, in every case of voodoo damage or death, there

has to be that element of devout belief in the powers of the witch or wizard, and through it a complete sense of identification with the doll. In addition, it helps if the victim knows what sort of damage the doll is sustaining — crushing, or pins sticking into it, or what. And you can take my word for it that no such news has reached Hal."

"What about the doll? Just to be absolutely sure, shouldn't we get it back?"

"I thought of that. But there's no way I know of of getting it back without making it look valuable to the woman. And if she thinks it's valuable to Hal, we'll never see it."

"Hm. Who is she, and what's her royal gripe?"

"She's as nasty a piece of fluff as they come. She got involved with Hal for a little while — nothing serious, certainly not on his part. He was . . . he's a big good-natured kid who thinks the only evil people around are the ones who get killed at the end of the movie. Kelley was at sea at the time and he blew in to find this little vampire taking Hal for everything she could, first by sympathy, then by threats. The old badger game. Hal was just bewildered. Kelley got his word that nothing had occurred between them, and then forced Hal to lower the boom. She called his bluff and it went to court. They

forced a physical examination on her and she got laughed out of court. She wasn't the mother of anyone's unborn child. She never will be. She swore to get even with him. She's without brains or education or resources, but that doesn't stop her from being pathological. She sure can hate."

"Oh. You've seen her."

Milton shuddered. "I've seen her. I tried to get all Hal's gifts back from her. I had to say all because I didn't dare itemize. All I wanted, it might surprise you to know, was that damned doll. Just in case, you know . . . although I'm morally convinced that the thing has nothing to do with it. Now do you see what I mean about a single example of unreason?"

"Fraid I do." I felt upset and sat upon and I wasn't fond of the feeling. I've read just too many stories where the scientist just hasn't the imagination to solve a haunt. It had been great, feeling-superior to a bright guy like Milton.

We walked out of there and for the first time I felt the mood of a night without feeling that an author was ramming it down my throat for story purposes. I looked at the clean-swept, star-reaching cubism of the Radio City area and its living snakes of neon, and I suddenly thought of an Evelyn Smith story the general idea of which was "After they found out

the atom bomb was magic, the rest of the magicians who enchanted refrigerators and washing machines and the telephone system came out into the open." I felt a breath of wind and wondered what it was that had breathed. I heard the snoring of the city and for an awesome second felt it would roll over, open its eyes, and . . . *speak*.

On the corner I said to Milton, "Thanks. You've given me a thumping around. I guess I needed it." I looked at him. "By the Lord I'd like to find some place where you've been stupid in this thing."

"I'd be happy if you could," he said seriously.

I whacked him on the shoulder. "See? You take all the fun out of it."

He got a cab and I started to walk. I walked a whole lot that night, just anywhere. I thought about a lot of things. When I got home the phone was ringing. It was Kelley.

I'm not going to give you a blow-by-blow of that talk with Kelley. It was in that small front room of his place — an apartment he'd rented after Hal got sick, and not the one Hal used to have — and we talked the night away. All I'm withholding is Kelley's expression of things you already know: that he was deeply attached to his brother, that he had no hope left for him, that he

would find who or what was responsible and deal with it his way. It is a strong man's right to break down if he must, with whom and where he chooses, and such an occasion is only an expression of strength. But when it happens in a quiet place, with the command of hope strongly in the air; when a chest heaves and a throat must be held wide open to sob silently so that the dying one shall not know; these things are not pleasant to describe in detail. Whatever my ultimate feelings for Kelley, his emotions and the expressions of them are for him to keep.

He did, however, know the name of the girl and where she was. He did not hold her responsible. I thought he might have a suspicion, but it turned out to be only a certainty that this was no disease, no subjective internal disorder. If a great hate and a great determination could solve the problem, Kelley would solve it. If research and logic could solve it, Milton would do it. If I could do it, I would.

She was checking hats in a sleazy club out where Brooklyn and Queens, in a remote meeting, agree to be known as Long Island. The contact was easy to make. I gave her my spring coat with the label outward. It's a good label. When she turned away with it I called her back and drunkenly asked her for the bill in the right-

hand pocket. She found it and handed it to me. It was a hundred. "Damn taxis never got change," I mumbled and took it before her astonishment turned to sleight-of-hand. I got out my wallet, crowded the crumpled note into it clumsily enough to display the two other C-notes there, shoved it into the front of my jacket so that it missed the pocket and fell to the floor, and walked off. I walked back before she could lift the hinged counter and skin out after it. I picked it up and smiled foolishly at her. "Lose more business cards that way," I said. Then I brought her into focus. "Hey, you know, you're cute."

I suppose "cute" is one of the four-letter words that describe her. "What's your name?"

"Charity," she said. "But don't get ideas." She was wearing so much pancake makeup that I couldn't tell what her complexion was. She leaned so far over the counter that I could see lipstick stains on her brassiere.

"I don't have a favorite charity yet," I said. "You work here all the time?"

"I go home once in a while," she said.

"What time?"

"One o'clock."

"Tell you what," I confided, "Let's both be in front of this place at a quarter after and see who stands who up, okay?" Without waiting for an answer I stuck

the wallet into my back pocket so that my jacket hung on it. All the way into the dining room I could feel her eyes on it like two hot glistening broiled mushrooms. I came within an ace of losing it to the head waiter when he collided with me, too.

She was there all right, with a yellowish fur around her neck and heels you could have driven into a pine plank. She was up to the elbows in jangly brass and chrome, and when we got into a cab she threw herself on me with her mouth open. I don't know where I got the reflexes, but I threw my head down and cracked her in the cheekbone with my forehead, and when she squeaked indignantly I said I'd dropped the wallet again and she went about helping me find it quietly as you please. We went to a place and another place and an after-hours place, all her choice. They served her sherry in her whiskey-ponies and doubled all my orders, and tilted the checks something outrageous. Once I tipped a waiter eight dollars and she palmed the five. Once she wormed my leather notebook out of my breast pocket thinking it was the wallet, which by this time was safely tucked away in my knit shorts. She did get one enamel cuff link with a rhinestone in it, and my fountain pen. All in all it was quite a duel. I was loaded to the eyeballs with thiamin hydrochloride and caffeine

citrate, but a most respectable amount of alcohol soaked through them, and it was all I could do to play it through. I made it, though, and blocked her at every turn until she had no further choice but to take me home. She was furious and made only the barest attempts to hide it.

We got each other up the dim dawnlit stairs, shushing each other drunkenly, both much soberer than we acted, each promising what we expected not to deliver. She negotiated her lock successfully and waved me inside.

I hadn't expected it to be so neat. Or so cold. "I didn't leave that window open," she said complainingly. She crossed the room and closed it. She pulled her fur around her throat. "This is awful."

It was a long low room with three windows. At one end, covered by a venetian blind, was a kitchenette. A door at one side of it was probably a bathroom.

She went to the Venetian blind and raised it. "Have it warmed up in a jiffy," she said.

I looked at the kitchenette. "Hey," I said as she lit the little oven, "Coffee. How's about coffee?"

"Oh, all right," she said glumly. "But talk quiet, huh?"

"Sh-h-h-h." I pushed my lips around with a forefinger. I circled the room. Cheap phonograph and records. Small-screen TV. A big

double studio-couch. A bookcase with no books in it, just china dogs. It occurred to me that her unsubtle approach was probably not successful as often as she might wish.

But where was the thing I was looking for?

"Hey, I wanna powder my noses," I announced.

"In there," she said. "Can't you talk quiet?"

I went into the bathroom. It was tiny. There was a foreshortened tub with a circular frame over it from which hung a horribly cheerful shower curtain, with big red roses. I closed the door behind me and carefully opened the medicine chest. Just the usual. I closed it carefully so it wouldn't click. A built-in shelf held towels.

Must be a closet in the main room, I thought. Hatbox, trunk, suitcase, maybe. Where would I put a devil-doll if I were hexing someone?

I wouldn't hide it away, I answered myself. I don't know why, but I'd sort of have it out in the open somehow . . .

I opened the shower curtain and let it close. Round curtain, square tub.

"Yup!"

I pushed the whole round curtain back, and there in the corner, just at eye level, was a triangular shelf. Grouped on it were four figurines, made apparently from kneaded wax. Three had wisps of

hair fastened by candle-droppings. The fourth was hairless, but had slivers of a horny substance pressed into the ends of the arms. Fingernail parings.

I stood for a moment thinking. Then I picked up the hairless doll, turned to the door. I checked myself, flushed the toilet, took a towel, shook it out, dropped it over the edge of the tub. Then I reeled out. "Hey honey, look what I got, ain't it *cute*?"

"Shh!" she said. "Oh for crying out loud. Put that back, will you?"

"Well, what is it?"

"It's none of your business, that's what it is. Come on, put it back."

I wagged my finger at her. "You're not being nice to me," I complained.

She pulled some shreds of patience together with an obvious effort. "It's just some sort of toys I have around. Here."

I snatched it away. "All right, you don't wanna be nice!" I whipped my coat together and began to button it clumsily, still holding the figurine.

She sighed, rolled her eyes, and came to me. "Come on, Dadsy. Have a nice cup of coffee and let's not fight." She reached for the doll and I snatched it away again.

"You got to tell me," I pouted.

"It's pers'nal."

"I wanna be personal," I pointed out.

"Oh all right," she said. "I had

a roommate one time, she used to make these things. She said you make one, and s'pose I decide I don't like you, I get something of yours, hair or toenails or something. Say your name is George. What is your name?"

"George," I said.

"All right, I call the doll George. Then I stick pins in it. That's all. Give it to me."

"Who's this one?"

"That's Al."

"Hal?"

"Al. I got one called Hal. He's in there. I hate him the most."

"Yeah, huh. Well, what happens to Al and George and all when you stick pins in 'em?"

"They're s'posed to get sick. Even die."

"Do they?"

"Nah," she said with immediate and complete candor. "I told you, it's just a game, sort of. If it worked believe me old Al would bleed to death. He runs the delicatessen." I handed her the doll, and she looked at it pensively. "I wish it did work, sometimes. Sometimes I almost believe in it. I stick 'em and they just yell."

"Introduce me," I demanded.

"What?"

"Introduce me," I said. I pulled her toward the bathroom. She made a small irritated "oh-h," and came along.

"This is Fritz and this is Bruno and — where's the other one?"

"What other one?"

"Maybe he fell behind the — Down back of —" She knelt on the edge of the tub and leaned over to the wall, to peer behind it. She regained her feet, her face red from effort and anger. "What are you trying to pull? You kidding around or something?"

I spread my arms. "What do you mean?"

"Come on," she said between her teeth. She felt my coat, my jacket. "You hid it some place."

"No I didn't. There was only four." I pointed. "Al and Fritz and Bruno and Hal. Which one's Hal?"

"That's Freddie. He give me twenny bucks and took twenny three out of my purse, the dirty —. But Hal's gone. He was the best one of all. You *sure* you didn't hide him?"

"The window!" she said, and ran into the other room. I was on my four bones peering under the tub when I understood what she meant. I took a last good look around and then followed her. She was standing at the window, shading her eyes and peering out. "What do you know? Imagine somebody would swipe a thing like that!"

A sick sense of loss was born in my solar plexus.

"Aw, forget it. I'll make another one for that Hal. But I'll never make another one that ugly," she added wistfully. "Come on, the coffee's — what's the mat-

ter? You sick? You look bad, Hal."

"Yeah," I said, "I'm sick."

"Of all the things to steal," she said from the kitchenette. "Who do you suppose would do such a thing?"

Suddenly I knew who would. I cracked my fist into my palm and laughed.

"What's the matter, you crazy?"

"Yes," I said. "You got a phone?"

"No. Where you going?"

"Out. Goodbye, Charity."

"Hey, now wait, honey. Just when I got coffee for you."

I snatched the door open. She caught my sleeve. "You can't go away like this. How's about a little something for Charity?"

"You'll get yours when you make the rounds tomorrow, if you don't have a hangover from those sherry highballs," I said cheerfully. "And don't forget the five you swiped from the tip-plate. Better watch out for that waiter, by the way. I think he saw you do it."

"You're not drunk!" she gasped.

"You're not a witch," I grinned. I blew her a kiss and ran out.

I shall always remember her like that, round-eyed, a little more astonished than she was resentful, the beloved dollar-signs fading from her hot brown eyes, the pathetic, useless little twitch of her hips she summoned up as a last plea.

Ever try to find a phone booth at five a.m.? I half-trotted nine blocks before I found a cab, and I was on the Queens side of the Triboro Bridge before I found a gas station open.

I dialed. The phone said, "Hello?"

"Kelley!" I roared happily. "Why didn't you tell me? You'd'a saved me sixty bucks worth of the most dismal fun I ever —"

"This is Milton," said the telephone. "Hal just died."

My mouth was still open and I guess it just stayed that way. Anyway it was cold inside when I closed it. "I'll be right over."

"Better not," said Milton. His voice was shaking with incomplete control. "Unless you really want to . . . there's nothing you can do, and I'm going to be . . . busy."

"Where's Kelley?" I whispered.

"I don't know."

"Well," I said. "Call me."

I got back into my taxi and went home. I don't remember the trip.

Sometimes I think I dreamed I saw Kelly that morning.

A lot of alcohol and enough emotion to kill it, mixed with no sleep for thirty hours, makes for blackout. I came up out of it reluctantly, feeling that this was no kind of world to be aware of. Not today.

I lay looking at the bookcase.

It was very quiet. I closed my eyes, turned over, burrowed into the pillow, opened my eyes again and saw Kelley sitting in the easy chair, poured out in his relaxed feline fashion, legs too long, arms too long, eyes too long and only partly open.

I didn't ask him how he got in because he was already in, and welcome. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to be the one to tell him about Hal. And besides I wasn't awake yet. I just lay there.

"Milton told me," he said. "It's all right."

I nodded.

Kelley said, "I read your story. I found some more and read them too. You got a lot of imagination."

He hung a cigarette on his lower lip and lit it. "Milton, he's got a lot of knowledge. Now, both of you think real good up to a point. Then too much knowledge presses him off to the no'theast. And too much imagination squeezes you off to the no'thwest."

He smoked a while.

"Me, I think straight through but it takes me a while."

I palmed my eyeballs. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's okay," he said quietly. "Look, I'm goin' after what killed Hal."

I closed my eyes and saw a vicious, pretty, empty little face. I said, "I was most of the night with Charity."

"Were you now?"

"Kelley," I said, "If it's her you're after, forget it. She's a sleazy little tramp but she's also a little kid who never had a chance. She didn't kill Hal."

"I know she didn't. I don't feel about her one way or the other. I know what killed Hal, though, and I'm goin' after it the only way I know for sure."

"All right then," I said. I let my head dig back into the pillow. "What did kill him?"

"Milton told you about that doll Hal give her."

"He told me. There's nothing in that, Kelley. For a man to be a voodoo victim, he's got to believe that —"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh. Milt told me. For hours he told me."

"Well, all right."

"You got imagination," Kelley said sleepily. "Now just imagine along with me a while. Milt tell you how some folks, if you point a gun at 'em and go bang, they drop dead, even if there was only blanks in the gun?"

"He didn't, but I read it somewhere. Same general idea."

"Now imagine all the shootings you ever heard of was like that, with blanks."

"Go ahead."

"You got a lot of evidence, a lot of experts, to prove about this believing business, ever' time any-one gets shot."

"Got it."

"Now imagine somebody shows up with live ammunition in his gun. Do you think those bullets going to give a damn who believes what?"

I didn't say anything.

"For a long time people been makin' dolls and stickin' pins in 'em. Wherever somebody believes it can happen, they get it. Now suppose somebody shows up with the doll all those dolls was copied from. The real one."

I lay still.

"You don't have to know nothin' about it," said Kelley lazily. "You don't have to be anybody special. You don't have to understand how it works. Nobody has to believe nothing. All you do, you just point it where you want it to work."

"Point it how?" I whispered.

He shrugged. "Call the doll by a name. Hate it, maybe."

"For God's sake's, Kelley, you're crazy! Why, there can't be anything like that!"

"You eat a steak," Kelley said,

"How your gut know what to take and what to pass? Do you know?"

"Some people know."

"You don't. But your gut does. So there's lots of natural laws that are goin' to work whether anyone understands 'em or not. Lots of sailors take a trick at the wheel without knowin' how a steering engine works. Well, that's me. I know where I'm goin' and I know I'll get there. What do I care how

does it work, or who believes what?"

"Fine, so what are you going to do?"

"Get what got Hal." His tone was just as lazy but his voice was very deep, and I knew when not to ask any more questions. Instead I said, with a certain amount of annoyance, "Why tell me?"

"Want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"Don't tell no one what I just said for a while. And keep something for me."

"What? And for how long?"

"You'll know."

I'd have risen up and roared at him if he had not chosen just that second to get up and drift out of the bedroom. "What gets me," he said quietly from the other room, "is I could have figured this out six months ago."

I fell asleep straining to hear him go out. He moves quieter than any big man I ever saw.

It was afternoon when I awoke. The doll was sitting on the mantelpiece glaring at me. Ugliest thing ever happened.

I saw Kelley at Hal's funeral. He and Milt and I had a somber drink afterward. We didn't talk about dolls. Far as I know Kelley shipped out right afterward. You assume that seamen do, when they drop out of sight. Milton was as busy as a doctor, which is very.

I left the doll where it was for a week or two, wondering when Kelley was going to get around to his project. He'd probably call for it when he was ready. Meanwhile I respected his request and told no one about it. One day when some people were coming over I shoved it in the top shelf of the closet, and somehow it just got left there.

About a month afterward I began to notice the smell. I couldn't identify it right away; it was too faint; but whatever it was, I didn't like it. I traced it to the closet, and then to the doll. I took it down and sniffed it. My breath "exploded out. It was that same smell a lot of people wish they could forget — what Milton called necrotic flesh. I came within an inch of pitching the filthy thing down the incinerator, but a promise is a promise. I put it down on the table, where it slumped repulsively. One of the legs was broken above the knee. I mean it seemed to have two knee joints. And it was somehow puffy, sick-looking.

I had an old hell-jar somewhere that once had a clock in it. I found it and a piece of inlaid linoleum, and put the doll under the jar so I could at least live with it.

I worked, and saw people — dinner with Milton, once — and the days went by the way they do, and then one night it occurred to me to look at the doll again.

It was in pretty sorry shape. I'd tried to keep it fairly cool, but it seemed to be melting and running all over. For a moment I worried about what Kelley might say, and then I heartily damned Kelley and put the whole mess down in the cellar.

And I guess it was altogether two months after Hal's death that I wondered why I'd assumed Kelley would have to call for the little horror before he did what he had to do. He said he was going to get what got Hal, and he intimated that the doll was that something.

Well, that doll was being got, but good. I brought it up and put it under the light. It was still a figuring, but it was one unholy mess. "Attaboy, Kelley," I gloated. "Go get 'em, kid."

Milton called me up and asked me to meet him at Rudy's. He sounded pretty bad. We had the shortest drink yet.

He was sitting in the back booth chewing on the insides of his cheeks. His lips were gray and he stopped his drink.

"What in time happened to you?" I gasped.

He gave me a ghastly smile. "I'm famous," he said. I heard his glass chatter against his teeth. He said, "I called in so many consultants on Hal Kelley that I'm supposed to be an expert on that — on that . . . condition." He

forced his glass back to the table with both hands and held it down. He tried to smile and I wished he wouldn't. He stopped trying and almost whimpered, "I can't nurse one of 'em like that again."

"You going to tell me what happened?" I asked harshly. That works sometimes.

"Oh, oh yes. Well they brought in a . . . another one. At General. They called me in. Just like Hal. I mean *exactly* like Hal. Only I won't have to nurse this one, no I won't, I won't have to. She died six hours after she arrived."

"*She?*"

"She just said the same thing over and over every time anyone talked to her. They'd say, 'What happened?' or 'Who did this to you?' or 'What's your name?' and she'd say 'He called me Dolly'. That's all she'd say, just 'He called me Dolly.'"

I got up. "Bye, Milt."

He looked stricken. "Don't go, will you, you just got —"

"I got to go," I said. I didn't look back. I had to get out and

ask myself some questions. Think.

Who's guilty of murder, I asked myself, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

I thought of a poor damn pretty empty little face with greedy hot brown eyes, and what Kelley said, "I don't care about her."

I thought, when she was twisting and breaking and sticking, how did it look to the doll? Bet she never even wondered about that.

I thought, action: A girl throws a fan at a man. Reaction: The man throws the girl at the fan. Action: A wheel sticks on a shaft. Reaction: Knock the shaft out of the wheel. Situation: We can't get inside. Resolution: Take the outside off it.

How do you kill a doll?

Who's guilty, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

"*He called me Dolly.*"

When I got home the phone was ringing.

"Hi," said Kelley.

I said, "It's all gone. The doll's all gone."

"All right," said Kelley.







LITTLE GIRL LOST

By Richard Matheson

Here, in the tense prose of Dick Matheson, is a new kind of trouble. You are an ordinary young husband living in a nice bungalow in an average town. You have a medium-priced car, an undistinguished dog, and a very special little daughter. The scene is set. Now — you wake up in the middle of an ordinary night and hear your daughter crying. You go to her room. You can still hear her. But she isn't there! Yet, she cries to you for aid. A perilous situation. We can only hope you get her back.

TINA's crying woke me up in a second. It was pitch black, middle of the night. I heard Ruth stir beside me in bed. In the front room Tina caught her breath, then started in again, louder.

"Oh, gawd," I muttered groggily.

Ruth grunted and started to push back the covers.

"I'll get it," I said wearily and she slumped back on the pillow. We take turns when Tina has her nights; has a cold or a stomach-ache or just takes a flop out of bed.

I lifted up my legs and dropped them over the edge of the blankets. Then I squirmed myself down to the foot of the bed and

slung my legs over the edge. I winced as my feet touched the icy floor boards. The apartment was arctic, it usually is these winter nights, even in California.

I padded across the cold floor threading my way between the chest, the bureau, the bookcase in the hall and then the edge of the tv set as I moved into the living-room. Tina sleeps there because we could only get a one bedroom apartment. She sleeps on a couch that breaks down into a bed. And, at that moment, her crying was getting louder and she started calling for her mommy.

"All right, Tina. Daddy'll fix it all up," I told her.

She kept crying. Outside, on the balcony, I heard our collie Mack jump down from his bed on the camp chair.

I bent over the couch in the darkness. I could feel that the covers were lying flat. I backed away, squinting at the floor but I didn't see any Tina moving around.

"Oh, my God," I chuckled to myself, in spite of irritation, "the poor kid's under the couch."

I got down on my knees and looked, still chuckling at the thought of little Tina falling out of bed and crawling under the couch.

"Tina, where are you?" I said, trying not to laugh.

Her crying got louder but I couldn't see her under the couch.

It was too dark to see clearly.

"Hey, where are you, kiddo?" I asked. "Come to papa."

Like a man looking for a collar button under the bureau I felt under the couch for my daughter, who was still crying and begging for mommy, mommy.

Came the first twist of surprise. I couldn't reach her no matter how hard I stretched.

"Come on, Tina," I said, amused no longer, "stop playing games with your old man."

She cried louder. My outstretched hand jumped back as it touched the cold wall.

"Daddy!" Tina cried.

"Oh for . . . !"

I stumbled up and jolted irritably across the rug. I turned on the lamp beside the record player and turned to get her, and was stopped dead in my tracks, held there, a half-asleep mute, gaping at the couch, ice water plaiting down my back.

Then, in a leap, I was on my knees by the couch and my eyes were searching frantically, my throat getting tighter and tighter. I heard her crying under the couch, but I couldn't see her.

My stomach muscles jerked in as the truth of it struck me. I ran my hands around wildly under the bed but they didn't touch a thing. I heard her crying and by God, she wasn't there!

"Ruth!" I yelled, "Come here."

I heard Ruth catch her breath in the bedroom and then there was a rustle of bedclothes and the sound of her feet rushing across the bedroom floor. Out of the side of my eyes I saw the light blue movement of her nightgown.

"What is it?" she gasped.

I backed to my feet, hardly able to breathe much less speak. I started to say something but the words choked up in my throat. My mouth hung open. All I could do was point a shaking finger at the couch.

"Where is she!" Ruth cried.

"I don't know!" I finally managed. "She . . ."

"What!"

Ruth dropped to her knees beside the couch and looked under.

"Tina!" she called.

"Mommy."

Ruth recoiled from the couch, color draining from her face. The eyes she turned to me were horrified. I suddenly heard the sound of Mack scratching wildly at the door.

"Where is she?" Ruth asked again, her voice hollow.

"I don't know," I said, feeling numb. I turned on the light and . . .

"But she's *crying*," Ruth said as if she felt the same distrust of sight that I did. "I . . . Chris, listen."

The sound of our daughter crying and sobbing in fright:

"Tina!" I called loudly, point-

lessly, "where *are* you, angel?"

She just cried. "Mommy!" she said, "Mommy, pick me up!"

"No, no, this is crazy," Ruth said, her voice tautly held as she rose to her feet, "she's in the kitchen."

"But . . ."

I stood there dumbly as Ruth turned on the kitchen light and went in. The sound of her agonized voice made me shudder.

"Chris! *She's not in here*."

She came running in, her eyes stark with fear. She bit her teeth into her lip.

"But, where *is* . . . ?" she started to say, then stopped.

Because we both heard Tina crying and the sound of it was coming from under the couch.

But there wasn't anything under the couch.

Still Ruth couldn't accept the crazy truth. She jerked open the hall closet and looked in it. She looked behind the tv set, even behind the record player, a space of maybe two inches.

"Honey, *help* me," she begged, "we can't just leave her this way."

I didn't move.

"Honey, she's under the couch," I said.

"But she's *not*!"

Once more, like the crazy, impossible dream it was, me on my knees on the cold floor, feeling under the couch. I got *under* the couch. I touched every inch of

floor space there. But I couldn't touch her, even though I heard her crying — *right in my ear.*

I got up, shivering from the cold and something else. Ruth stood in the middle of the living-room rug staring at me. Her voice was weak, almost inaudible.

"Chris," she said, "Chris, what is it?"

I shook my head. "Honey, I don't know," I said, "I don't know *what* it is."

Outside, Mack began to whine as he scratched. Ruth glanced at the balcony door, her face a white twist of fear. She was shivering now in her silk gown as she looked back at the couch. I stood there absolutely helpless, my mind racing a dozen different ways, none of them toward a solution, not even toward concrete thought.

"What are we going to do?" she asked, on the verge of a scream I knew was coming.

"Baby, I . . ."

I stopped short and suddenly we were both moving for the couch.

Tina's crying was fainter.

"Oh, no," Ruth whimpered, "No, Tina."

"Mommy," said Tina, further away. I could feel the chills racing over my flesh.

"Tina, come back here!" I heard myself shouting, the father yelling at his disobedient child, who can't be seen.

"TINA!" Ruth screamed.

Then the apartment was dead silent and Ruth and I were kneeling by the couch looking at the emptiness underneath. Listening.

To the sound of our child, peacefully snoring.

"Bill, can you come right over?" I said frantically.

"What?" Bill's voice was thick and fuzzy.

"Bill, this is Chris. Tina has disappeared!"

He woke up.

"She's been kidnaped?" he asked.

"No," I said, "she's here but . . . she's not here."

He made a confused sound. I grabbed in a breath.

"Bill, for God's sake get over here!"

A pause.

"I'll be right over," he said. I knew from the way he said it he didn't know why he was coming.

I dropped the receiver and went over to where Ruth was sitting on the couch shivering and clasping her hands tightly in her lap.

"Hon, get your robe," I said, "You'll catch cold."

"Chris, I . . ." Tears running down her cheeks. "Chris, where is she?"

"Honey."

It was all I could say, hopelessly, weakly. I went into the bedroom and got her robe. On the way back I stooped over and

twisted hard on the wall heater.

"There," I said, putting the robe over her back, "put it on."

She put her arms through the sleeves of the robe, her eyes pleading with me to do something. Knowing very well I couldn't do it, she was asking me to bring her baby back.

I got on my knees again, just to be doing something. I knew it wouldn't help any. I remained there a long time just staring at the floor under the couch. Completely in the dark.

"Chris, she's s-sleeping on the floor," Ruth said, her words faltering from colorless lips. "Won't . . . she catch cold?"

"I . . ."

That was all I could say. What could I tell her? No, she's not on the floor? How did I know? I could hear Tina breathing and snoring gently on the floor but she wasn't there to touch. She was gone but she wasn't gone. My brain twisted back and forth on itself trying to figure out that one. Try adjusting to something like that sometime. It's a fast way to breakdown.

"Honey, she's . . . she's not here," I said. "I mean . . . not on the floor."

"But . . ."

"I know, I know . . ." I raised my hands and shrugged in defeat. "I don't think she's cold, honey," I said as gently and persuasively as I could.

She started to say something too but then she stopped. There was nothing to say. It defied words.

We sat in the quiet room waiting for Bill to come. I'd called him because he's an engineering man, CalTech, top man with Lockheed over in the valley. I don't know why I thought that would help but I called him. I'd have called anyone just to have another mind to help. Parents are useless beings when they're afraid for their children.

Once, before Bill came, Ruth slipped to her knees by the couch and started slapping her hands over the floor.

"Tina, wake up!" she cried in newborn terror, "wake up!"

"Honey, what good is that going to do?" I asked.

She looked up at me blankly and knew. It wasn't going to do any good.

I heard Bill on the steps and reached the door before he did. He came in quietly, looking around and giving Ruth a brief smile. I took his coat. He was still in pajamas.

"What is it, kid?" he asked hurriedly.

I told him as briefly and as clearly as I could. He got down on his knees and checked for himself. He felt around underneath the couch and I saw his brow knot into lines when he heard Tina's

calm and peaceful breathing

He straightened up.

"Well?" I asked.

He shook his head. "My God," he muttered.

We both stared at him. Outside Mack was still scratching and whining at the door.

"Where is she?" Ruth asked again. "Bill, I'm about to lose my mind."

"Take it easy," he said. I moved beside her and put my arm around her. She was trembling.

"You can hear her breathing," Bill said. "It's normal breathing. She must be all right."

"But where is she?" I asked. "you can't see her, you can't even touch her."

"I don't know," Bill said and was on his knees by the bed again.

"Chris, you'd better let Mack in," Ruth said, worried about that for a moment, "he'll wake all the neighbors."

"All right, I will," I said and kept watching Bill.

"Should we call the police?" I asked. "Do you . . . ?"

"No, no, that wouldn't do any good," Bill said, "this isn't . . ." He shook his head as if he were shaking away everything he'd ever accepted. "It's not a police job," he said.

"Chris, he'll wake up all the . . ."

I turned for the door to let Mack in.

"Wait a minute," Bill said and

I was turned back, my heart pounding again.

Bill was half under the couch, listening hard.

"Bill, what is . . . ?" I started. "Shhh!"

We were both quiet. Bill stayed there a moment longer. Then he straightened up and his face was blank.

"I can't hear her," he said

"Oh, no!"

Ruth fell forward before the couch.

"Tina! Oh God, where is she!"

Bill was up on his feet, moving quickly around the room. I watched him, then looked back at Ruth slumped over the couch, sick with fear.

"Listen," Bill said, "do you hear anything?"

Ruth looked up. "Hear . . . anything?"

"Move around, move around," Bill said. "See what you hear."

Like robots Ruth and I moved around the living room having no idea what we were doing. Everything was quiet except for the incessant whining and scratching of Mack. I gritted my teeth and muttered a terse — "Shut up!" — as I passed the balcony door. For a second the vague idea crossed my mind that Mack knew about Tina. He'd always worshipped her.

Then there was Bill standing in the corner where the closet was, stretching up on his toes and lis-

tening. He noticed us watching him and gestured quickly for us to come over. We moved hurriedly across the rug and stood beside him.

"Listen," he whispered. We did.

At first there was nothing. Then Ruth gasped and none of us were letting out the noise of breath.

Up in the corner, where the ceiling met the walls, we could hear the sound of Tina sleeping.

Ruth stared up there, her face white, totally lost.

"Bill, what the . . ." I gave up.

Bill just shook his head slowly. Then suddenly he held up his hand and we all froze, jolted again.

The sound was gone.

Ruth started to sob helplessly. "Tina."

She started out of the corner.

"We have to find her," she said despairingly. "Please."

We ran around the room in unorganized circles, trying to hear Tina. Ruth's tear-streaked face was twisted into a mask of fright.

I was the one who found her this time.

Under the television set.

We all knelt there and listened. As we did we heard her murmur a little to herself and the sound of her stirring in sleep.

"Want my dolly," she muttered.

"Tina!"

I held Ruth's shaking body in my arms and tried to stop her sobbing. Without success. I couldn't keep my own throat from tightening, my heart from pounding slow and hard in my chest. My hands shook on her back, slick with sweat.

"For God's sake, *what is it?*" Ruth said but she wasn't asking us.

Bill helped me take her to a chair by the record player. Then he stood restlessly on the rug, gnawing furiously on one knuckle, the way I'd seen him do so often when he was engrossed in a problem.

He looked up, started to say something then gave it up and turned for the door.

"I'll let the pooch in," he said. "He's making a hell of a racket."

"Don't you have any idea what might have happened to her?" I asked.

"Bill . . . ?" Ruth begged.

Bill said, "I think she's in another dimension," and he opened the door.

What happened next came so fast we couldn't do a thing to stop it.

Mack came bounding in with a yelp and headed straight for the couch.

"He *knows!*" Bill yelled and dived for the dog.

Then happened the crazy part.

One second Mack was sliding under the couch in a flurry of ears, paws and tail. Then he was gone — *just like that*. Blotted up. The three of us gaped.

Then I heard Bill say, "Yes. Yes."

"Yes, *what?*" I didn't know where I was by then.

"The kid's in another dimension."

"What are you talking about?" I said in worried, near-angry tones. You don't hear talk like that everyday.

"Sit down," he said.

"Sit down? Isn't there anything we can *do*?"

Bill looked hurriedly at Ruth. She seemed to know what he was going to say.

"I don't know if there is," was what he said.

I slumped back on the couch.

"Bill," I said. Just speaking his name.

He gestured helplessly.

"Kid," he said, "this has caught me as wide open as you. I don't even know if I'm right or not but I can't think of anything else. I think that in some way, she's gotten herself into another dimension, probably the fourth. Mack, sensing it, followed her there. But how did they get there? — I don't know. I was under that couch, so were you. Did you see anything?"

I looked at him and he knew the answer.

"Another . . . *dimension?*"

Ruth said in a tight voice. The voice of a mother who has just been told her child is lost forever.

Bill started pacing, punching his right fist into his palm.

"Damn, damn," he muttered. "How do things like this happen?"

Then while we sat there numbly, half listening to him, half for the sound of our child, he spoke. Not to us really. To himself, to try and place the problem in the proper perspective.

"One dimensional space a line," he threw out the words quickly. "Two dimensional space an infinite number of lines — an infinite number of one dimensional spaces. Three dimensional space an infinite number of planes — an infinite number of two dimensional spaces. Now the basic factor . . . the basic factor . . ."

He slammed his palm and looked up at the ceiling. Then he started again, more slowly now.

"Every point in each dimension a *section* of a line in the next higher dimension. All points in line-*sections* of the perpendicular lines that make the line a plane. All points in plane are sections of perpendicular lines that make the plane a solid.

"That means that in the third dimension . . ."

"Bill, for God's sake!" Ruth burst out. "Can't we *do* some-

thing? My *baby* is in . . . in *there*."

Bill lost his train of thought. He shook his head.

"Ruth, I don't . . ."

I got up then and was down on the floor again, climbing under the couch. I *had* to find it! I felt, I searched, I listened until the silence rang. Nothing.

Then I jerked up suddenly and hit my head as Mack barked loudly in my ear.

Bill rushed over and slid in beside me, his breath labored and quick.

"God's sake," he muttered, almost furiously. "Of all the damn places in the world . . ."

"If the . . . the *entrance* is here," I muttered, "why did we hear her voice and breathing all over the room?"

"Well, if she moved beyond the effect of the third dimension and was entirely in the fourth — then her movement, for us would seem to spread over all space. Actually she'd be in one spot in the fourth dimension but to us . . ."

He stopped.

Mack was whining. But more importantly Tina started in again. Right by our ears.

"He brought her back!" Bill said excitedly. "Man, what a mutt!"

He started twisting around, looking, touching, slapping at empty air.

"We've got to find it!" he said.

"We've got to reach in and pull them out. God knows how long this dimension pocket will last."

"What?" I heard Ruth gasp, then suddenly cry, "Tina, where are you? This is mommy."

I was about to say something about it being no use but then Tina answered.

"Mommy, mommy! Where are you, mommy?"

Then the sound of Mack growling and Tina crying angrily.

"She's trying to run around and find Ruth," Bill said. "But Mack won't let her. I don't know *how* but he seems to know where the joining place is."

"Where *are* they for God's sake!" I said in a nervous fury.

And backed right into the damn thing.

To my dying day I'll never really be able to describe what it was like. But here goes.

It was black, yes — to me. And yet there seemed to be a million lights. But as soon as I looked at one it disappeared and was gone. I saw them out of the sides of my eyes.

"Tina," I said, "where are you? Answer me! Please!"

And heard my voice echoing a million times, the words echoing endlessly, never ceasing but moving off as if they were alive and traveling. And when I moved my hand the motion made a whistling sound that echoed and re-echoed

and moved away like a swarm of insects flowing into the night.

"Tina!"

The sound of the echoing hurt my ears.

"Chris, can you hear her?" I heard a voice. But was it a voice — or more like a thought?

Then something wet touched my hand and I jumped.

Mack.

I reached around furiously for them, every motion making whistling echoes in vibrating blackness until I felt as if I were surrounded by a multitude of birds flocking and beating insane wings around my head. The pressure pounded and heaved in my brain.

Then I felt Tina. I say I felt her but I think if she wasn't my daughter and if I didn't *know*

somehow it was her, I would have thought I'd touched something else. Not a shape in the sense of third dimension shape. Let it go at that, I don't want to go into it.

"Tina," I whispered. "Tina, baby."

"Daddy, I'm scared of dark," she said in a thin voice and Mack whined.

Then I was scared of dark too, because a thought scared my mind.

How did I get us all out?

Then the other thought came — Chris, have you got them?

"I've got them!" I called.

And Bill grabbed my legs (which, I later learned, were still sticking out in the third dimension) and jerked me back to re-



ality with an armful of daughter and dog and memories of something I'd prefer having no memories about.

We all came piling out under the couch and I hit my head on it and almost knocked myself out. Then I was being alternately hugged by Ruth, kissed by the dog and helped to my feet by Bill. Mack was leaping on all of us, yelping and drooling.

When I was in talking shape again I noticed that Bill had blocked off the bottom of the couch with two card tables.

"Just to be safe," he said.

I nodded weakly. Ruth came in from the bedroom.

"Where's Tina?" I asked automatically, uneasy left-overs of memory still cooking in my brain.

"She's in our bed," she said. "I don't think we'll mind for one night."

I shook my head.

"I don't think so," I said.

Then I turned to Bill.

"Look," I said. "What the hell happened?"

"Well," he said, with a wry grin, "I told you. The third dimension is just a step below the fourth. In particular, every point in our space is a section of a perpendicular line in the fourth dimension."

"So?" I said.

"So, although the lines forming the fourth dimension would

be perpendicular to every point in the third dimension, they wouldn't be parallel — to us. But if enough of them in one area happened to be parallel in both dimensions — it might form a connecting corridor."

"You mean . . . ?"

"That's the crazy part," he said. "Of all the places in the world — under the couch — there's an area of points that are sections of parallel lines — parallel in both dimensions. They make a corridor into the next space."

"Or a hole," I said.

Bill looked disgusted.

"Hell of a lot of good my reasoning did," he said. "It took a dog to get her out."

I groaned softly.

"You can have it," I said.

"Who wants it?" he answered.

"What about the sound?"

"You're asking me?" he said.

That's about it. Oh, naturally, Bill told his friends at CalTech, and the apartment was overrun with research physicists for a month. But they didn't find anything. They said the thing was gone. Some said worse things.

But, just the same, when we got back from my mother's house where we stayed during the scientific seige — we moved the couch across the room and stuck the television where the couch was.

So some night we may look up and hear Arthur Godfrey chuckling from another dimension.

THE MATHEMATICIANS

BY ARTHUR FELDMAN

We gave this story to a very competent, and very pretty gal artist. We said, "Read this carefully, dream on it, and come up with an illustration." A week later, she returned with the finished drawing. "The hero," she said. We did a double take. "Hey! That's not the hero." She looked us straight in the eye. "Can you prove it?" She had us. We couldn't, and she left hurriedly to go home and cook dinner for her family. And what were they having? Frog legs — what else!

THEY were in the garden. "Now, Zoe," said Zenia Hawkins to her nine-year-old daughter, "quit fluttering around, and papa will tell you a story."

Zoe settled down in the hammock. "A true story, papa?"

"It all happened exactly like I'm going to tell you," said Drake Hawkins, pinching Zoe's rosy cheek. "Now: two thousand and eleven years ago in 1985, figuring by the earthly calendar of that time, a tribe of beings from the Dog-star Sirius invaded the earth."

"And what did these beings look like, father?"

"Like humans in many, many respects. They each had two arms, two legs and all the other organs

that humans are endowed with."

"Wasn't there any difference at all between the Star beings and the humans, papa?"

"There was. The newcomers, each and all, had a pair of wings covered with green feathers growing from their shoulders, and long, purple tails."

"How many of these beings were there, father?"

"Exactly three million and forty-one male adults and three female adults. These creatures first appeared on Earth on the island of Sardinia. In five weeks' time they were the masters of the entire globe."

"Didn't the Earth-lings fight back, papa?"

"The humans warred against



the invaders, using bullets, ordinary bombs, super-atom bombs and gases."

"What were those things like, father?"

"Oh, they've passed out of existence long ago. 'Ammunition' they were called. The humans fought each other with such things."

"And not with ideas, like we do now, father?"

"No, with guns, just like I told you. But the invaders were immune to the ammunition."

"What does 'immune' mean?"

"Proof against harm. Then the humans tried germs and bacteria against the star-beings."

"What were those things?"

"Tiny, tiny bugs that the humans tried to inject into the bodies of the invaders to make them sicken and die. But the bugs had no effect at all on the star-beings."

"Go on, papa. These beings over-ran all Earth. Go on from there."

"You must know, these newcomers were vastly more intelligent than the Earth-lings. In fact, the invaders were the greatest mathematicians in the System."

"What's the System? And what does mathematician mean?"

"The Milky Way. A mathematician is one who is good at figuring, weighing, measuring, clever with numbers."

"Then, father, the invaders

killed off all the Earth-ings?"

"Not all. They killed many, but many others were enslaved. Just as the humans had used horses and cattle, the newcomers so used the humans. They made workers out of some, others they slaughtered for food."

"Papa, what sort of language did these Star-beings talk?"

"A very simple language, but the humans were never able to master it. So, the invaders, being so much smarter, mastered all the languages of the globe."

"What did the Earth-ings call the invaders, father?"

"'An-vils'. Half angels, half devils."

"Then papa, everything was peaceful on Earth after the An-vils enslaved the humans?"

"For a little while. Then, some of the most daring of the humans, led by a man named Knowall, escaped into the interior of Greenland. This Knowall was a psychiatrist, the foremost on Earth."

"What's a psychiatrist?"

"A dealer in ideas."

"Then, he was very rich?"

"He'd been the richest human on Earth. After some profound thought, Knowall figured a way to rid the earth of the An-vils."

"How, papa?"

"He perfected a method, called the Knowall-Hughes, Ilinski technique, of imbuing these An-vils with human emotions."

"What does 'imbuing' mean?"

"He filled them full of and made them aware of."

Zenia interrupted, "Aren't you talking a bit above the child's understanding, Drake?"

"No, Mama," said Zoe. "I understand what papa explained. Now, don't interrupt."

"So, Knowall," continued Drake, "filled the An-vils with human feelings such as Love, Hate, Ambition, Jealousy, Malice, Envy, Despair, Hope, Fear, Shame and so on. Very soon the An-vils were acting like humans, and in ten days, terrible civil wars wiped out the An-vils population by two-thirds."

"Then papa, the An-vils finally killed off each other?"

"Almost, until among them a being named Zalibar, full of saintliness and persuasion, preached the brotherhood of all An-vils. The invaders, quickly converted, quit their quarrels, and the Earthlings were even more enslaved."

"Oh, papa, weren't Knowall and his followers in Greenland awfully sad the way things had turned out?"

"For a while. Then Knowall came up with the final pay-off."

"Is that slang, papa? Pay-off?"

"Yes. The coup-de-grace. The ace in the hole that he'd saved, if all else failed."

"I understand, papa. The idea that would out-trump anything the other side had to offer. What was

it, father? What did they have?"

"Knowall imbued the An-vils with nostalgia."

"What is nostalgia?"

"Home sickness."

"Oh, papa, wasn't Knowall smart? That meant, the An-vils were all filled with the desire to fly back to the star from where they had started."

"Exactly. So, one day, all the An-vils, an immense army, flapping their great green wings, assembled in the Black Hills of North America, and, at a given signal, they all rose up from Earth and all the humans chanted, 'Glory, glory, the day of our deliverance!'"

"So then, father, all the An-vils flew away from Earth?"

"Not all. There were two child An-vils, one male and one female, aged two years, who had been born on Earth, and they started off with all the other An-vils and flew up into the sky. But when they reached the upper limits of the strato-sphere, they hesitated, turned tail and fluttered back to Earth where they had been born. Their names were Zizzo and Zizza."

"And what happened to Zizzo and Zizza, papa?"

"Well, like all the An-vils, they were great mathematicians. So, they multiplied."

"Oh, papa," laughed Zoe, flapping her wings excitedly. "that was a very nice story!"



By RICHARD WILSON

KJAL STORY EITHER TREMENDOUS FACT OR
COLOSSAL HOAX STOP KJAL EITHER SOLID MAN
OR MISTY SPOOK STOP NATION AND WORLD IN
FOR EITHER SOUL SHAKING EXPERIENCE OR
BELLY SHAKING LAUGH STOP ALL RELEASES SO
FAR READ QUOTE CONFIDENTIAL UNQUOTE STOP
WHITE HOUSE WONT TALK STOP STATE DEPART-
MENT WONT TALK STOP WAR DEPARTMENT WONT
TALK STOP ON MY WAY TO DEPT OF FISHERIES
STOP HOLD PRESSES STOP MORE TO FOLLOW STOP

ONLY a few reporters were in the White House press room when the girl came in with the daily calling list. It was before nine o'clock on a frosty March morning. The girl thumbtacked the list to the cork-faced bulletin board, frowned at it, shrugged and then went back through the foyer to her desk in the Press Secretary's office.

The United Press man lifted himself, yawning, off the desktop where he had been sitting watching a news program on the television set at the far end of the room. He took a pencil and a fold of copy paper from his pocket and

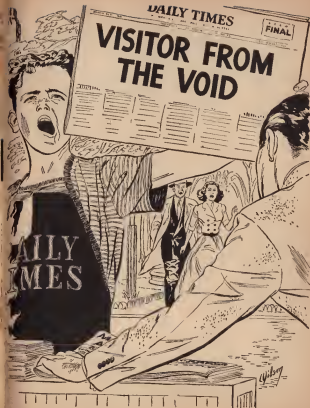
prepared to jot down the more interesting names, if any, from the typewritten list of those who would be calling on the President that day.

His yawn evaporated as he read the list.

It said:

CALLING LIST

- | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 10:15 | Senator Herbert Lehman,
New York |
| 10:30 | Mr. Walter Reuther,
C.I.O. |
| 11:00 | Secretary of State |
| Noon | Budget Director |
| 12:30 | Lunch |
| 1:30 | Mr. Kjal, Mars |



Years of ingrained skepticism battled with the urge to spin into UP's private telephone booth and cry "Flash!" along the direct line to his office.

The skepticism won. He took down the list and studied that line.

. . . 1:30 Mr. Kjal, Mars . . .

The typist had been known to make some real boners in her day. Maybe she had meant to type Hjalmar somebody, as in Hjalmar Schacht, that one-time financial wizard of Hitler Germany. Or maybe it was Mars, Pennsylvania. There was a Mars in Pennsylvania, wasn't there? Or it could be a man from the Mars candy bar people — the ones who made Milky Ways. Better check.

He went into the Press Secretary's office.

"This 1:30 appointment of the President's," he said. "How about that?"

"What about it?" asked the Press Secretary.

The UP man put the calling list on the desk.

"This Mars business," he said. "Is that a typographical error?"

The Press Secretary looked at the list.

"No," he said.

"That's a straight answer, anyway," the reporter said. "Now would you care to elaborate?"

"No," the Press Secretary said.

The UP man was exasperated.

"Look," he said. "This could be the biggest story of the century, or it could be only as big as Aunt Emmy getting her foot caught in the screen door. Open up, will you?"

"You know I wouldn't give you anything exclusively," the Press Secretary said. "What you know from me the other boys have to know, too."

"I'm not asking for anything like that," the reporter said. "Just tell me this — or if you won't tell me, add it to the list, officially — when you say Mars do you mean Mars, Pennsylvania, or Mars the candy bar or Mars the planet?"

"I see your problem," the Press Secretary said. "Okay."

He took the list and inked in after Mars:

(The Planet.)

He handed the list back to the UP man.

"This is the straight goods?"

"The straight goods," said the Press Secretary.

"Is that all you'll say now?"

"That's all."

"Okay. Thanks."

The UP man went back to the press room, walking casually.

The Associated Press reporter looked up from the other end of the room as he entered and asked:

"The calling list out yet?"

"I've got it," the UP man said carelessly.

"Okay, after you," said the AP.

The UP said "Right" and eased into his phone booth. He lifted the receiver and whispered into the mouthpiece:

"Bulletin."

"Go ahead."

"Dateline. The White House indicated today that the age of interplanetary travel has dawned. Paragraph.

"The sensational announcement was made in the most routine form possible. It appeared as a single line on the President's calling list, which is posted daily in

the White House press room. The list shows the people who will call on the President in his office each day. Paragraph.

"Today it listed quote Mr. Kjal — K as in King, J as in Jerusalem, A as in Apple, L as in Liberty — comma Mars. (That's Mars the planet, Mac. Got it? Okay.) Unquote. The appointment was scheduled for 1:30 p.m.

"(Yeah, I know it's sensational. No, of course I'm not drunk. Yes, the Press Secretary confirmed it. Okay, make it a flash if you want to. Here's the rest. Hurry up, or



"All cadets—atten—SHUN!"

the other guys'll get suspicious. Yes, it's a beat. You'll be two or three minutes ahead if you get it right out.)

"Paragraph. A reporter checked with the President's Press Secretary and was told that no mistake had been made in the list. At the reporter's request he confirmed that the Mars referred to was the planet Mars, and not a town or a company of that name. Paragraph.

"But the Press Secretary declined to elaborate. It was indicated that no further details would be available until the Martian had actually paid his call on the President. . . ."

The UP man came out of the booth, perspiring. He lighted a cigaret and tacked the calling list back on the bulletin board as the AP man strode over.

"You've been up to something," the AP man said. "I can tell."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah — say, what is this?" the AP yelled. He pulled the list off the board. His cry brought over at a run the third wire service reporter, the man from International News Service. The INS grabbed at the calling list but missed. The AP held it over his head and scowled up at it.

"Mr. Kjal, Mars," he read. "What the hell?"

The INS peered up, too. "For crying out loud," he said.

"It's on the level," the UP said. "You needn't go running inside.

He won't tell you any more than's right there on the list. You'd better phone it in. I did."

The AP lunged into his booth and yanked the receiver off the hook. "You'd cut your grandmother's throat if your desk needed a good homicide," he said to the UP. "Bulletin!" he yelled into the telephone. "Grab a sharp pencil!"

The INS threw himself into his booth and cried "Flash!"

The UP went back into his. "Send over two or three more guys," he said to his desk. "We may need them. For your information, AP and INS have just started dictating. AP's is a bulletin. INS is flashing it."

It was lunchtime, but no one went out to lunch. The White House press room was crammed with frustrated reporters who had learned there was nothing they could do until 1:30.

They had bombarded the Press Secretary with questions, which were met by a series of "No comments." The Appointments Secretary wasn't seeing anyone. The Department of State said all information would have to come from the White House. The Department of Defense said the same. The Federal Communications Commission said it didn't know anything and sounded sulky.

The reporters sat around smoking nervously or making themselves lunch from the stock of cold

cuts and beer in their private refrigerator, or watching television.

The set had been tuned to a channel where a commentator was talking speculatively about the story while showing photographic slides of Mars and waiting for the arrival of his special guest, Mr. Robert Willey, the noted rocket expert.

The White House regulars were playing their complicated stud poker game, High Low Low-Hole Card Wild, but they played without enthusiasm and continually looked at their wrist watches.

One-thirty was H hour. At 1:15 they sent out scouts to watch all entrances to the White House, to see how Mr. Kjal would arrive and what he looked like.

But by 1:35 there had been no sign of him and by 1:45 the reporters were in a state of fidgets. Their desks kept the phones ringing to ask if the Martian had arrived and all the reporters could say was that they didn't know. The Press Secretary was no help. He declined even to say whether Mr. Kjal had reached the White House. The most he would do was to refuse to deny, when asked, that the visitor was a Martian from Mars. This negative scrap of information was duly passed on to the reporters' respective desks, who only demanded more, no matter how trivial.

At 2:15 the Cuban Ambassador, who had been standing, ignored

by the press, next to the huge round table in the foyer, was shown into the President's office.

Mr. Kjal had not come out in the usual way, if he had ever gone in.

The Press Secretary leaned back in his swivel chair and declined to say whether the Martian had left by a side entrance. Was he still in the White House as a guest maybe? No comment. What were Mr. Kjal's plans? No comment. Would he describe the caller? No. Had he, personally, seen Mr. Kjal? No comment. It was infuriating.

Would there be a statement? Yes, one was being prepared now; patience, boys, please.

Finally the girl came in with a mimeographed statement. The copies were torn out of her hands and a torrent of reporters hurled themselves through the door, into the foyer where the Cuban Ambassador, hoping to be interviewed, was forced to jump to a sofa to avoid being trampled on. The reporters surged into the press room and to the telephones, yelling like wild animals.

On their way to the phones the reporters had discovered that the statement consisted of just one sentence. It said merely that the President and Mr. Kjal had had a 40-minute conversation during which topics of mutual interest were discussed.

The statement was dictated to

their desks by the reporters with what elaboration they could muster, and then the torrent was back in the Press Secretary's office. There would be no further statement today, he said.

"The lid is on, boys," he said. That meant there would be no more news of any kind from the White House, short of something transcendental.

Would the President have a statement at his press conference tomorrow?

That would be up to the President, the Press Secretary said.

Would the conference be held at the usual time?

Yes, at 10:30 a.m., in Old State.

There the matter had to rest overnight. Thousands of words flowed out over the news wires and over the radio waves and through television receivers, but ninety-five per cent of them were speculation.

It was the biggest story since the discovery of the New World, but all the details could have been put into a thimble.

The auditorium in the Old State Department Building across from the White House was filled to the doors an hour before the scheduled time of the press conference. Every reporter with White House accreditation was there. So were scores of special correspondents for whom temporary cards had been issued and who had flown in

from the north, south and west.

The three wire service correspondents were down front, in the first row of chairs. Close by were the men from the New York Times, the Washington Star, the Chicago Tribune, Reuters of London, Agence France Presse, and Tass.

There was a murmur of talk and a creaking of the wooden chairs as the reporters waited, impatiently. Even the most blasé of them might have admitted a tense excitement.

They watched the door the President would come through. He was late. His aides already were at their places at the front of the auditorium. Finally the President came in, alone.

He was smiling, but it was a subdued smile. He exchanged greetings with the three wire service correspondents and a few other reporters he knew by name.

The President waited quietly for the last of the talk to die away in the large auditorium. He took out a handkerchief and patted his head. He put the handkerchief away in an inside pocket, then adjusted the double-breasted suit.

When it was quiet the President whispered to an aide and received a sheet of paper.

He said he had an announcement. There was a great rustle of paper as the reporters prepared to write down each word. Then, with a grin, the President announced

the appointment of a new member of the Federal Reserve Board. There was a laugh, in which the President joined, and some of the reporters dutifully made notes.

The President handed the sheet of paper back to the aide and said that was all he had today. Were there any questions?

There was bedlam. The President smiled and shook his head and raised his arms to quiet the noise. He asked those who had questions to hold up their hands and said he would recognize them individually. He nodded first to the AP, who asked:

"Is it true, Mr. President, that you had a conference yesterday with a Mr. Kjal, a resident of Mars, the planet?"

The President, following custom in declining to permit direct quotation of his remarks, said Yes, and a very pleasant conversation, too.

The UP asked what language the conversation had been conducted in.

English, the President replied. Mr. Kjal spoke the language excellently.

The National Broadcasting Company asked if the President would repeat that pronunciation of the Martian's name.

The President did, saying the *k* was silent and the *j* was like the *j* in the French Jacques or Jean.

The INS asked for a description of the visitor.

The President said Mr. Kjal had asked not to be described and he would respect his wishes.

The 'Christian Science Monitor': "Is Mr. Kjal the representative of one race or nation on Mars, and if so how many nations are there?"

Mr. Kjal was the representative of the only race on Mars, the President replied, saying Mr. Kjal had full authority from his government to conduct the conference with the President.

The Washington Post: "Are the Martians friendly? Not warlike, that is?"

The President chuckled and said that Mr. Kjal was quite friendly.

The Chicago Tribune: "What



form of government does Mars have? I mean, is it for instance a socialistic welfare state form of government?"

The President replied that the form of government was rather complex and could not be conveniently tagged with any one of the terms used on Earth.

The New York Times: "By what means did the Martian arrive and is he still here on Earth?"

The President said he was not at liberty to describe Mr. Kjal's means of transportation and added that the Martian had returned to his planet.

The New York Daily Mirror: "Did he arrive by flying saucer?"

The President, amid laughter, replied that he could say flatly that Mr. Kjal had not arrived, or departed, by flying saucer. He added that he would entertain no further questions about the means of transportation.

Tass, the Soviet news agency: "Why did he choose the United States instead of the Soviet Union to visit? Not that it isn't possible that the Martian hasn't already visited that great country, long before he came to Washington."

No comment, said the President.

The Atlanta Constitution: "Mr. President, I wonder if you would care to tell us, in your own words, the reasons behind the Martian's visit and what the meaning of it is, as you see it?"

The President replied that the visit had been an extremely interesting experience and he was honored to have been chosen by Mr. Kjal from among the Chief Executives of many great nations on Earth for the conversation they had had. But the President added that he would prefer not to discuss the matter philosophically; only in a factual way.

The three wire service men were becoming restive. They did not want the story to become too complicated. It had to be dictated at top speed after the traditional race to the telephones when the press conference broke up, and they'd had just about enough to handle easily. They needed one or two more points cleared up first, though, and after a hurried conference among themselves the three shot up their hands simultaneously. The President recognized them in turn.

The AP: "Does the Martian plan another trip to Earth, and if so, when?"

Mr. Kjal did not plan to return, nor did any other Martian expect to make the trip, as far as he knew, the President replied.

The INS: "Did Mr. Kjal say whether there were any other planets besides Mars and Earth that have intelligent life?"

The President said that was a very good question but he regretted that the subject had not

come up in his conversation with Mr. Kjal.

The UP: "Does Mr. Kjal's visit perhaps mean that the United States is closer to achieving interplanetary travel than most people realize?"

No comment, the President said.

The UP: "Let me put it another way, then. Would you say that one of the results of the visit was to help pave the way for peaceful relations between Earth and Mars when we eventually achieve interplanetary travel?"

He would, the President said; definitely.

The senior wire service correspondent cut through a sudden clamor of other questions from behind him to cry:

"Thank you, Mr. President!"

As always, that was the signal that the conference had come to an end.

The three wire service men broke into a dead run for their telephones.

That was all the world ever learned officially about Mr. Kjal, the man from Mars. The newspapers, the broadcasters, the television stations and the magazines played the story, sensationally or factually, in accordance with their editorial policies. Many newspapers printed the transcript of the press conference in full, to show their readers exactly how the story had developed.

Dozens of "it was learned" or "sources close to the White House" stories appeared in print, but none was authoritative and no one outside the President's official family ever knew any more than the President had told the press that day.

It had been the truth, of course, as far as it went.

But the President had not told the reporters that the visit from Mr. Kjal had been a strangely spiritual experience. In fact, the President by revealing the exact nature of their encounter might have had his sanity questioned. And yet the visit could not have been ignored. The press, and through it the world, had to be told — but just so much.

That night, in the privacy of his study with his personal journal open on his desk, the President tried to reduce his experience to words. It was extremely difficult.

Mr. Kjal had materialized in this very room two nights ago, in the most reassuring way possible. He had sent a thought ahead of him, telling the President what he intended to do, and directed the President's eyes toward the wing chair beside the fireplace. Then, as the President watched, the chair shimmered as if momentarily obscured by haze and Mr. Kjal was sitting there, smiling.

The President found himself smiling, too. It was the friendliest

imaginable kind of meeting — no fear or doubt marred it and there they had talked, for four hours, like two old friends.

Their talk had been of everything and nothing. They spoke of the President's deep concern that the Earth might again be torn by war despite the hopes of its people for lasting peace. They spoke of hunger and disease and of personal insecurity. They spoke of childhood.

The President recalled a tranquil time when he had fished in a country brook with a golden-haired collie sitting tall beside him on the bank. And Mr. Kjal spoke

of his childhood, too, in such a familiar way that the President felt that his visitor might have been a boy from the next town when he had fished the brook and that if he had gone upstream they might have met.

No, he could not have described the conversation to the reporters. He had explained this to Mr. Kjal and the Martian himself had suggested that he make an appearance in the President's executive office the next day so he could say truthfully that Mr. Kjal had been a White House caller in the accepted sense of the term.

The President, seeking the right words for his private journal, re-



called an article in which the dean of a divinity school theorized that beings of other worlds might have supernatural gifts — which would have explained, theologically, Mr. Kjal's mysterious journey from Mars. The supernatural had no need of space ships. But the public did, if it was to accept Mr. Kjal at all.

The President thought then of the growing public belief that travel to Mars and other worlds was to be possible. But what strange forms limited imaginations had assigned to these men from Mars! How far from the mark they had been.

They had visualized semi-monsters instead of semi-gods.

He doubted if the reporters would have swallowed that one without considerable carrying on.

And how could the President have replied to the question put to him by the reporter from the Atlanta Constitution?

He could have said that since Earth had directed its attention to Mars and the conquest of the space between the planets a need had arisen for mankind to be worthy of that conquest. That Mr. Kjal was the embodiment of that need. That the greedy, belligerent, precocious infant Earth was on the path to the stars — a path bordered with things of beauty and fragility. That only a well-adjusted, mature Earth could be permitted to travel that path,

as a friendly, curious creature in a new world — a humble creature willing to be shown the way.

But not a destroyer. A destroyer would have to be destroyed.

The President could picture the headlines this would have evoked: "Earth Gets Martian Ultimatum!"

No, he had said enough to the reporters.

Now the details of the Martian's visit were beginning to blur in his mind, desperately as he tried to retain them. But he knew this — because of the visit he would be a wiser man and through the great power of his office the world would be a better place.

The President mused for a time longer and then he wrote in his journal. There didn't seem to be much to put down, now.

He wrote only this:

"Had a pleasant meeting with Mr. Kjal, of Mars. He is a fine, sincere man who represents a learned, peaceful people. He has returned home and said he would not come again. We will see him again, one day, but only when our people have the knowledge to permit us to travel to his land.

"It is my fervent wish that when that time comes we will be as spiritually advanced as we are scientifically and that the people of our world will live peaceably and profitably in communion with the people of his world.

"Mr. Kjal thought that everything would work out all right."

THE HANDS

BY RICHARD STERNBACH

The story of the creation, in all its majesty, was written in six hundred words. Will the destruction be told as briefly?

HE WAS a gigantic figure, sitting there atop the mountain. He could have leaned over and dammed the river below with a finger. He sat on top of the mountain, and his beard in the wind was a white flag.

Across the plains, as he watched, there were fires glowing, and the mountain under him trembled from explosions a thousand miles away. He bent his head, and a muffled cry reverberated down the hillside and through the valley.

A smaller figure appeared beside him, looking sad.

"Try again, father," the smaller one said.

The old one shook his head. "It would be the same."

"Give them another chance."

"They would do it again."

"Just once more."

The old one shook his head again, and for a while they sat, and they watched the destruction. The fires burned higher, and the explosions shook their mountain more roughly.

At last, at the end, the old one reached down and scooped up some clay from the bank of the river. He held it in a huge, gentle hand, and the younger one smiled.

"You are good to give them another chance, father."

"Not them," said the old one.

"What do you mean?" the son asked, wonderingly.

"Something else," the majestic figure answered, starting to knead the clay. "What shall it be?"



Illustrator: Ray Bonham





THE SLOTHS OF KRUVNY

BY VERN FEARING

This world we live in is a pretty grim place. It's tough to make a living. At any moment we may get blown up, down or sideways by the atom bomb. The day after tomorrow may never come, and on-top of all this, TV commercials are getting worse and worse. It seems that our only salvation is a sense of humor, so we give you "The Sloths . . ." a very unserious yarn.

BRADLEY BROADSHOULDERS — friends called him "Brad", or "Broad", or "Shoulders" — stood grim-lipped, as is the custom of spacemen, and waited for the Commander to speak fateful words. He was an obese youth, fully five feet tall, without a shred of muscle, but he wore the green tunic of the Galaxy Patrol proudly, and his handsome, bony head boasted a tidy crop of Venusian fungus. His gleaming eyes gleamed.

"Brad, We Are In A Tough Fix!" the Commander said suddenly. His name was Metternich, known also as Foxy Gran'pa; he had spoken in capitals all over Europe and continued the practice since. "We Are Up Against It!" he went on. "The Fate Of The World May Be At Stake!"

"What's wrong, chief?" asked Brad, jauntily.

"Plenty!" roared Metternich. "Nobody's Attacking The Earth — That's What's Wrong! Nobody Is Out To Conquer The Universe! How Come, May I Arsk?"

Brad gulped. Could he believe his ears? No one attacking good, kind, old Earth? Was there nothing in which a man could pin his faith, let alone his ears? Were they, indeed, his ears?

He turned to his best friend, Ugh, who stood beside him. Would he stand behind him? Did he realize they were on the verge of A Mission? Ugh was a *pastiche*, or *intermeso* — a cross between a Martian and a Texan — as loathsome and stupid a combination as one could wish. Why he was Brad's best friend was a mystery. Squarely, he met Brad's gaze, which left him an eye to spare. It winked, and Brad shuddered.

It was an omen . . .

"I Want To Know Why!" the Commander shouted. "You Have Your Secret Orders! Off With You!"

A really fat omen.

The good ship, *Lax Wing*, was almost ready to go. She was a fine, spaceworthy craft, Brad knew; just the same, it was disconcerting to see rats deserting her by the thousands. Not that he missed them; some were sure to return as soon as Ugh appeared on the scene; he seemed to fascinate them.

Just then, the rats paused. Sure enough, Ugh was coming. He was reeling. He had apparently made the rounds, as is the custom of spacemen, swilling vast quantities of airplane dope, and he was high as a kite. Brad glommed him glumly in the gloaming, with more than a glimmer of gloomy foreboding. It was wrong, he thought, all wrong. If only it hadn't been too late to turn back. But it wasn't. They hadn't even started yet. If anything, it was too early. There was no way out. He entered the spaceship with a Si. Si, whose whole name was Silas Mariner, shook his hand weakly, muttered: "Remember the *Albatross*!" and tottered out.

It was an omen . . .

Presently, Brad and Ugh were blasting off. As the cigar-shaped vessel rose to the starry void, spacemen, their visages lined and tanned like cigars, held their cigars aloft in silent salute and gently flicked their ashes, while softly, a cigar band played "*Maracas, Why You No Love Me No More!*"

Two days out, Brad summoned

Ugh. "How fast are we going?"

"Oh, say, . . . 30,000 miles an hour?"

Brad calculated rapidly and put down his abacus. "At this rate it'll take us 14 years just to get out of our own lousy solar system!" he barked. "Faster!"

Ugh said Yes, Sir, and vice versa. Then he upped the speed to 186,000 miles per second and came back and shyly told Brad.

Brad said "Bah! We'll be 70 years reaching the Big Dipper! Faster!"

"But *nothing* can't go any faster!" protested Ugh. "According to Einstein -"

"To hell with Einstein!" roared Brad. "Is he paying your salary?"

So they went faster.

The ship sped onward — unless it was upward — to fulfill its Mission. Again and again Brad found himself wondering where he was going. The Mission was a real stin. He knew only that since there was practically no life anywhere in the solar system, except for good, kind, old Earth — Earth had seen to that — anyone attacking Earth — or not doing so — was obviously somewhere in outer space! But here the trail ended.

Courage, he told himself, courage! After all, was he not the grandson of Pierre Fromage, inventor of the rubberband motor? With a start, he realized he was not.

His own heritage, while covered with peculiar glory, was a more tragic one — the spacemen's heritage. The Broadshouklers were brave, but things happened to them. His grandfather, a traffic officer, had chased a comet for speeding, and had, unfortunately, overtaken it. His father had been spared the fire, but one day, aboard his spaceship, someone spilled a glass of water. The gravity was out at the time, and the water just hung there in mid-air until Brad's father walked into it and drowned.

What would be his own end, he wondered? What other way was there to die? Just then, through the bulkhead, he could hear Ugh swinging in his hammock, playing the violin. He wondered if the rats were dancing, like the last time he'd surprised him. Another thought was on the way, something about rats and a new way to die, but Brad was already asleep, mercifully having a nightmare.

It was morning of the fifth day when the *Emergency Alarm* (E-A) was suddenly activated! Instantly, a host of automatic devices went off. One turned on the fan, another blew the fuses, a third made the beds. Bells clinged and bugles sounded every call from *Battle Stations* (B-S) to *Abandon Ship* (J-r). Brad and Ugh slept through it all. Nothing was wrong, except with the *Emergency Alarm* (E-A).

It wore itself out and the eventful voyage continued.

Brad woke on the ninth day. The 2-day pill he'd taken on the third day had evidently done its work well. He was rested, he felt optimistic again. When he looked out the porthole, he could see plenty of space for improvement.

— But what was *that*?

There, half obscured in a tumbling, swirling mass of misty gray clouds, he could make out something white! He pressed his nose against the porthole and strained his eyes. It gave him the feeling of peering into a Bendix, as is the custom of spacemen. His mouth went damp-dry. This was it — whatever it was!

"Ugh!" he shouted, all agog. "Ugh! Ugh!"

Ugh dashed in, wheeling a large kaleidoscope. Expertly, they read the directions and trained it on the mysterious formation. The Indicator turned pale.

"By the ring-tailed dog star of Sirius!" barked Brad. "Why, it's nothing more than an enormous gallstone, revolving in space!"

"This is Sirius!" barked Ugh.

"That's what *I* barked!" snapped Brad. "And don't ask me *whose* it is! It's big enough to support life, that's the main issue! Prepare to land!"

A strange, yet resplendent, civilization, thought Brad, looking out at a sunlit landscape, or gallscape, of molten gold. The houses, stylish

igloos and mosques, were sturdily constructed of 3-ply cardboard and driftwood. Before each house, mysteriously, stood a Berber pole of solid peppermint.

Brad and Ugh bounded out of their ship. The two bounders stood there, encased in heat-resistant pyrex pants, expecting the natives to make things hot for them. Dumbfounded at the delay, they waited for the attack to commence. It did not.

"I never!" said Brad, presently. "If we needed proof, we've got it! Such a display of indolence is testimony enough that these people are responsible for not attacking Earth! We shall have to use stratagemy!"

Swiftly, he took off his pants, revealing underneath the red flannel costume of a 17th century French courtier, complete with powdered wig and Falstaff. Ugh ran up a flag emblazoned with the legend: *Diplomacy And Agriculture*, then planted beans all around the ship, while Brad postured and danced the minuet.

The clever scheme worked beautifully. Soon an old man began circling them on a bicycle, keeping a safe distance. Clearly, he was someone of importance, for his long white beard was carefully braided and coiled in a delivery basket on the handlebars. Furthermore, he wore a glowing circlet on his forehead — so that Brad knew he was able to read

their minds — if they had any. "How about throwing us a couple circlets?" Brad cried.

Instead, the old man, who was hard of hearing, flung them a couple cutlets, which worked even better, and had protein besides.

Thus fortified, they were escorted to the palace.

Some moments earlier, Brad had learned first, that Kruvny was the name of this unusual culture, and second, that the High Kruv himself, attended by all his nobles, would see him. Brad had then entered the Kruv Chamber, or Trapeze Room, and he had learned nothing since. It was all true, he told himself. The High Kruv was hanging by his toes from a trapeze, and so were all his nobles. The only difference was that the High Kruv's trapeze was more ornate than the rest. Yes, said Brad to himself, it was all true; he had been shaking and punching his head, and nothing had changed.

"I come," he said, "from a far away land —"

"Shad-dap!" cried the Kruv. "Who cares?"

At this, the old man, who was still on his bicycle, whispered to Brad. "They've all got headaches," he nodded, stroking his beard sagebrushly. "It's all part of a great cosmic error — a tragedy played among the spiral nebulae, to the hollow ringing laughter

of the gods! You see, we Sloths are only half the population of Kruvny," he went on. "On the other side of our world live the Sidemen, or Sad Sax. Legend has it that cons ago, the Sidemen were mistakenly delivered a cargo of saxophones, from Saks Fifth Avenue." The old man's voice was hushed as he added, "They have been practicing ever since."

"I see," said Brad. "And that accounts for the headaches here?"

"Small wonder," said the old man. "I bless the day I went deaf."

"But why do they do it?" asked Brad.

"The Sidemen? They're tryin' to drive us off'n the ranch — the planet, I mean. Yuh see, they claim they *made* this whole durned gallstone thei'selves!"

"Made it?" asked Brad, dully.

"Uh-huh." The old man spat Mercurian tobacco juice. "Just like on Earth, where myrid minute oceanic organisms pile their skeletons to form coral islands. Yuh see, the Sidemen eat radishes — love 'em, in fact — but it gives 'em gallstones. They claim this whole world is the collected gallstones of their ancestors." The old man wiped Mercurian tobacco juice from his beard and shoes. "Kind of a hard claim to heat," he opined.

"I see," said Brad. "That explains the misty swirling clouds all around this planet, and why

it's seldom visible. You follow me?"

"Yep," said the old man. "It's gas. Them radishes'll turn on you every time!"

Suddenly the High Kruv began to sob. "Now you see, don't you, why we haven't attacked Earth? A body can't keep his mind on anything around here! I asked for a few secret weapons, and what did I get?" He was blubbering now. "Oh, I tried, I tried! Appropriations and all that; you may be sure we lined our pockets — but after years of stalling, they showed up with two weapons they swore were terrible enough to put an end to war. One of them was a water pistol."

"I see," said Brad. "And the other?"

"A ray gun."

Brad's eyes brightened. "A ray gun? May I see how it works?"

"Indeed you may!"

A platoon of maroon dragoons dragged in a queer apparatus. It looked like a medieval cannon, with a Victorian phonograph speaker flaring from its business end. The dragoons ranged around the weapon, keeping their backs to it. One of them clutched the firing lanyard. There was a pause, a brittle silence — then the lanyard snapped!

"'Ray!'" shouted the ray gun.

"What was that?" asked Brad.

Twice more the lanyard snapped. The ray gun boomed: "'Ray! Ray!'"

"You mean all it does is shout 'Ray?'" asked Brad.

"Well, it can also shout 'Max'" said the old man. "Fearful, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Brad. He took a piece of old parchment from a breast pocket. "This," he stated, "is the original deed to Manhattan. Notice here on the bottom where it says \$24. I am signing it over to you." He signed with a flourish. "Now you have a legal claim, a crusade, and a nice piece of property. Go get it!"

"But the headaches!" cried the old man.

"Cool, man, cool!" said Brad. "I'll mix a Bromo."

"Is it habit-forming?" cried the High Kruv.

"Not a bit," said Brad, mixing it. "Simply take one an hour, forever. And now I must bid you farewell."

"Wait!" cried the Kruv. "Don't



"He dropped in Sunday to see Zoo Parade and he's been here ever since!"

you want to take my lovely daughter back with you?"

Brad looked at her. She was lovely. She had scales, but she was lovely. She had magnificent blonde hair, some of it almost an inch long, none of it on her head, but she was lovely.

"... Well," said Brad, hesitatingly. He had his eyes glued on her; when he took them off, they made a noise like vacuum cups: "Pfffoopp!"

"Your mother won't like her," whispered Ugh.

"... Well," said Brad. He could feel Duty tugging inside. Not for him the pipe and slippers. He was one of spaceway's men; he would go the spacemen's way, off into waymen's space. Waymen, not women, he told himself sternly. The call of the Ether . . . the vacuous void . . . the black velvet wastes . . . the outspread cloak of the universe, dripping with stardust . . . the undreamt-of galaxies . . . these were the things by which he lived.

"... Well," said Brad.

"C'mon," said Ugh. "We'll only fight over her."

Slowly, they bounded back to their spaceship.

The ship sped backward, headed for Earth. It was days before the mistake was discovered, and this alone spared their lives. For had they completed their journey on schedule — but why be morbid?

The fact is, the Earth blew up.

What a sight. The whole thing, whirling one minute like the globe in Miss Fogarty's geography supply closet — the next minute, whamo!

"Gee," said Ugh, soberly. "Guess we're lucky, huh?"

"... Well," said Brad. He hadn't said anything else for days, but he didn't seem well at all. Funny, he thought. They promise you if you go on working, work hard and don't fool around, don't ask questions, just do your job, everything'll come your way. The next thing they're all dead, and there's nobody to complain to, even. Was it selfish to think of one's career at a time like this? No, he told himself. It was all he knew. The Patrol was all that mattered!

He did some rapid calculation. They were far off the interplanetary travel lanes; their fuel supply was down to a single can of kerosene; food for perhaps 2 days remained. As he listened to Ugh tuning his violin, scarcely audible over the squeakings and squealings that filled the spaceship, he realized that the only solution — the only thing that could save them, or the future of Earthmen — was for a shipload of beautiful dames to rescue them within the next 36 hours.

He figured the odds against this to be fifty billion to one — but Brad had fought big odds before.

Grim-lipped, he shaved.

One big name per story is usually considered to be sufficient. So when two of them appear in one by-line, it can certainly be called a scoop; so that's what we'll call it. H. L. Gold and science-fiction go together like a blonde and a henna rinse. Robert Krepps is also big time. You may know him also under his other label — Geoff St. Raymond, but a Krepps by any name can write as well.



THE ENORMOUS ROOM



BY H. L. GOLD & ROBERT KREPPS

THE ROLLER coaster's string of cars, looking shopworn in their flaky blue and orange paint, crept toward the top of the incline, the ratcheted lift chain clanking with weary patience. In the front seat, a young couple held hands and prepared to scream. Two cars back, a heavy, round-shouldered, black-mustached man with a swarthy skin clenched his hands on the rail before him. A thin blond fellow with a briefcase on

his lap glanced back and down at the receding platform, as though trying to spot a friend he had left behind. Behind him was a Negro youth, sitting relaxed with one lean foot on the seat; he looked as bored as someone who'd taken a thousand coaster rides in a summer and expected to take ten thousand more.

In the last car, a tall broad man put his elbows on the backboard and stared at the sky with-

out any particular expression on his lined face.

The chain carried its load to the peak and relinquished it to the force of gravity. The riders had a glimpse of the sprawling amusement park spread out below them like a collection of gaudy toys on the floor of a playroom; then the coaster was roaring and thundering down into the hollow of the first big dip.

Everyone but the Negro boy and the tall man yelled. These two looked detached — without emotion — as though they wouldn't have cared if the train of cars went off the tracks.

The cars didn't go off the tracks. The people did.

The orange-blue rolling stock hit the bottom, slammed around a turn and shot upward again, the wind of its passage whistling boisterously. But by then there were none to hear the wind, to feel the gust of it in watered eyes or open shouting mouths. The cars were empty.

"Is this what happens to everybody who takes a ride on the coaster?" asked a bewildered voice with a slight Mexican accent. "*Santos*," it continued, "to think I have wait so many years for this!"

"What is it?" said a woman. "Was there an accident? Where are we?"

"I don't know, dear. Maybe

we jumped the tracks. But it certainly doesn't look like a hospital."

John Summersby opened his eyes. The last voice had told the truth: the room didn't look like a hospital. It didn't look like anything that he could think of offhand.

It was about living-room size, with flat yellow walls and a gray ceiling. There was a quantity of musty-smelling straw on the floor. Four tree trunks from which the branches had been lopped were planted solidly in that floor, which felt hard and a little warm on Summersby's back. Near the roof was a round silver rod, running from wall to wall; over in a corner was a large shallow box filled with something, he saw as he slowly stood up, that might have been sand. An old automobile tire lay in the straw nearby, and a green bird-bath sort of thing held water that splashed from a tiny fountain in its center. Five other people, four men and a woman, were standing or sitting on the floor.

"If it was a hospital, we'd be hurt," said a thin yellow-haired man with a briefcase under one arm. "I'm all right. Feel as good as I ever did."

Several men prodded themselves experimentally, and one began to take his own pulse. Summersby stretched and blinked his eyes; they felt gummy, as

though he'd been asleep a long time, but his mouth wasn't cottony, so he figured the blacked-out interval must have been fairly short.

"Where's the door?" asked the woman.

Everyone stared around the room except Summersby, who went to the fountain, scooped up a palmful of water, and drank it. It was rather warm, with no chemical taste.

"There isn't any door," said a Negro boy. "Hey, there isn't a door at all!"

"There must be a door," said the heavy man with the accent.

Several of them ran to the walls. "Here's something," said the blond man, pushing with his fingertips. "Looks like a sliding panel, but it won't budge. We never came in through anything *that* small, anyway." He looked over at Summersby. "You didn't, at least. I guess they could have slid me through it."

"They?" said the woman in a piercing voice. "Who are they?"

"Yes," said the heavy man, looking at the blond man accusingly, "who put us here?"

"Don't ask me," said the blond man. He looked at a watch, held it to his ear, and Summersby saw him actually go pale, as at a terrible shock. "My God," he gasped, "what day is this?"

"Tuesday," said the Negro.

"That's right. We got on the

coaster about eleven Tuesday morning. It's three o'clock Thursday!" His voice was flat and astonished as he held up the watch. "Two days," he said, winding it. "This thing's almost run down."

"How do you know it's Thursday?" asked Summersby.

"This is a chronograph, High-pockets," said the blond man.

"Calvin, we've been kidnapped!" the woman said shrilly, clutching at a man who must be her husband or boy friend.

"No, no, dear. How could they do it on a roller coaster?"

"*María y José!*" said the Mexican. "Then for two days that idiot relief man has had charge of my chili stand! It'll go to hell!"

"Our things at the hotel," the woman said, "all my new clothes and the marriage license."

"They'll be all right, dear."

"And where's my bag?"

The blond man stooped and picked up a leather handbag from the straw. "This it?" She took it and rummaged inside before she said, "Thank you."

"I don't like all this," said the Negro boy. "Where are we? I got to get back to my job. Where's the door?"

"Come on," said the man with the briefcase shortly, "let's get out of here and find out what's what." He was going along the wall, pushing and rapping it

"How did they cop us, that's what I'd like to know. All I remember is hitting the bottom of that big dip, and then I was waking up in here." He stopped, then said sharply, "I hear something moving. My God! It sounds as big as an elephant."

Then the wall began to glide noiselessly and smoothly to the left, and he scuttled back to the knot of them, looking over his shoulder.

The entire wall slid sideways and vanished, leaving an open end to the room through which Summersby could see a number of large structures that seemed to be machinery, painted various colors. There was no sign of movement. He wondered, in a quiet, detached way, what sort of people might be out there.

"It sounded big," said the blond man again, and looked up at Summersby.

"I am six feet five," said Summersby blankly. "Whoever it is will have to go some to top me."

An unknown thing moved beyond the room with a brief shuffling sound and then a hand came in through the open end. It was on an arm with a wrist the thickness of Summersby's biceps, an arm two yards long with no indication that it might not be even longer. The hand itself was a foot and a half broad, with a

prehensile thumb at either side. Summersby did not notice how many fingers it had. The backs of the fingers and the whole great arm were covered with a thick gray-black thatch of coarse hair, and the naked palm was gun-metal gray. Between one thumb and finger it held a long green rod that was tipped by an ivory-colored ball.

There was no sign of anyone looking in, only the incredible arm and hand.

The others cried out and drew together. Summersby stood still, watching the hand. It poked the stick forward in short jabs, once just missing his head. Then it made a wide sweep and the stick collided with the fat Mexican. He squealed, and at once the hand shot forward, exposing still more of the thick arm, and prodded him away from the group. He skipped toward a far corner, but the stick had him now and was tapping him relentlessly toward the open end.

"*Amigos!*" he yelled, his voice full of anguish. "*Por favor, save me!*"

"Go along with it peaceably," advised the Negro youth frightenedly. "Don't get it annoyed." He was shaking and his glasses kept sliding down his sweaty nose so that he had to push them up continually.

"What is it?" the woman was asking, over and over.

The Mexican was driven to the edge of the room. The place beyond seemed to be much larger than their prison. He waved his hands despairingly.

"Now, quick, you have only a moment to save me! Don't stand there!"

The stick touched him and he jumped as if he had been shocked. The wall began to slide into place again.

"Let's rush it," said the man with the briefcase suddenly.

"Why?" asked Summersby. The wall closed and they were alone, staring at one another.

"There wasn't anything we could do," the Negro said. "It happened too quick. But if it comes in again we better fight it." He looked around, plainly expecting to be contradicted. "We can't get split up like this."

"Possibly one of us can suggest something," said the husband. He was a sober-looking man of about twenty-eight or thirty, with a face veneered by stubborn patience. "We should make a real try at escape."

"We know where the door is, at least," said the blond man. He went to the sliding wall and threw his weight obliquely against it. "Give me a hand here, will you, big fellow?"

"You won't move it that way," said Summersby. He sat down on the automobile tire, which

seemed to have been chewed on by some large animal. "It's probably electrically operated."

"We can try, can't we?"

Summersby did not answer. In one corner, six feet off the floor, was a thing he had not noticed before, a network of silver strands like an enormous spider's web or a cat's cradle. He stared at it, but after the first moment he did not actually see it. He was thinking of the forest, and wishing dully that he might have died there.

The woman spoke sharply, intruding on his detachment; he hoped someone would sit on her. "Will you please *do* something, Calvin! We must get out of this place."

"Where are we, anyway?" asked the Negro boy, who looked about nineteen, a tall, well-built youth with beautiful hands. "How'd they get us here? And what was that thing that took the Mex?"

"It doesn't matter where we are," snapped the woman.

"Yes, if does, ma'am," said the youth. "We got to know how they brought us here before we can escape."

"The hell we do," said the blond man. "We can't guess our location until we get out. I think you're right about the door," he told Summersby. "There isn't any lock to it you could reach

from inside. The mechanism for sliding and locking must be inside the wall itself. Nothing short of a torch will get through to it." He came over to Summersby. "We'll have to gimmick it next time it opens."

"With what?" asked the woman's husband.

"Something small, so it won't be noticed."

"Your briefcase?" suggested the husband, who had a hard New England twang.

"No, chum," said the blond man, "not my briefcase."

"Hey, look," said the Negro. "What happened, anyway? I remember the coaster hitting the dip and then nothing, no wind or motion, until I woke up here. And it's two days later."

"I lost consciousness at the same place," said the New Englander.

"Something was done to knock us out," said the blond man. "Then we must have been taken off the cars at the end of the ride, and brought here." He rubbed his chin, which was stubbled with almost invisible whiskers. "That's impossible, on the face of it," he went on, "but it must be the truth." He grinned; it was the first time Summersby had seen any of them smile. "Unless I'm in a hatch," he said.

"Are we in South America? Or Africa?" asked the Negro.

"Why?"

"That hand!"

"Yeah," said the blond man, "that never grew on anything American." The colored boy looked at him, ready to take offence. "Could it be a freak gorilla?"

"That size and with two thumbs?" asked the boy. "And what would it be doing roaming around loose?"

"Could it be a machine?" asked the husband. "A robot?" His wife screamed, and Summersby got up and went over to the door, getting as far as possible from them. His stomach was a hard ball of hunger, and he wished he were a thousand miles away. Anywhere.

"That hand was alive," said the Negro. "I never saw anything like it in biology, but I'd sure love to dissect it. Did you see those two thumbs? I don't know any animal that has two thumbs."

"Would you come over, sir?" called the New Englander. Summersby realized he was talking to him. "We must plan a course of action." Reluctantly Summersby joined them. "My name is Calvin Full, sir, and this is Mrs. Full."

Summersby took his hand; it was dry and had a preciseness about its grip that irritated him. "John Summersby."

"I'm a milk inspector. My wife and I were on our honeymoon,"



Tom A. Sullivan

said Full. "I work through the southern portions of Vermont; that's in the New York milk shed, you know."

"I didn't know. I'm a forest ranger," said Summersby. Retired, he thought bitterly, pensioned off to die with a rotten heart. They couldn't even let a man die on the job, in the woods.

"My work," said Calvin Full, "consists of watching for unsanitary and unsterile practices, making tuberculin tests, and so forth. I'm afraid I'm not much good at this sort of emergency."

His wife, who had been looking as if she would scream again, turned to him. Her almost-pretty face, cleared of fright, was swept by pride. "You're as brave as the next man, Calvin, and as clever. You'll get us home."

"I hope so, dear. But Mr. Summersby must be a great deal more used to problems of this sort."

They all gaped up at him expectantly. Because of his size, of course; he was the big born leader! "Sir" in trouble, "High-pockets" when things were clear again. The hell with them. He kept his mouth shut.

The blond man said, "I'm Tom Watkins."

"Adam Pierce," said the Negro.

"What do you do, Adam?"

The boy pushed his glasses up on his nose again, frowning. "I go to C.C.N.Y. Summers, I'm

the Wild Man from Zululand in the sideshow, and I shill for the coaster when I'm not on duty. It helps out my family some, for me to be making money in the summers."

"Are you taking subjects that might help us?" asked Full.

"I major in English. I'm going to teach it when I graduate. Then I take psych, biology, the usual courses."

"Hm," said Watkins, looking at the end of the room through which the Mexican had been taken. "Psych and biology. Could be some use here."

"What we need is a locksmith," said Summersby. He felt himself unwillingly drawn into the group, sharing their problems that were not his, and it angered him. He fished out a bent pack of cigarettes, lit one and was about to put the rest away.

"Nothing but a torch would help. I know a little about locks myself." Watkins grinned genially. "I'm out of smokes," he said, and Summersby gave him the pack. He took one and passed it to Full, who declined. Adam took one. The boy reached up and pushed at his glasses again; a look of irritation appeared on his face. "Say," he muttered, "is this room a little wobbly, or is it my eyes?"

"Wobbly?"

"Wavy. See how those tree trunks are blurred?"

"You need your glasses changed, Adam," said Watkins.

"No, sir," Adam took them off and started to polish them on a handkerchief; then his brown eyes opened wide. "I can see!" he said. The others stared at him. "My astigmatism's gone! My glasses make everything blur, but I can see plain as noon without 'em. Look, I've had astigmatism since I was a kid!"

"What happened?" asked the woman, addressing her husband. "How could that be, Calvin?"

"Don't know, dear."

"My headache is gone," she said. "I never realized it till this boy mentioned his eyes."

"Mrs. Full has suffered from an almost constant headache for years," said Calvin, and sniffed twice. "My post-nasal drip is missing, too. Do you suppose my sinus trouble is cleared up?"

"That's what must have been happening those two days we were out," said Watkins, knocking ash from his cigarette. "We were put through a hospital or something. I feel good, even if I'm damned hungry."

Summersby looked from one to another, detesting them; against his will, against sanity and decency that fought for recognition, he detested them. He had a heart for which there was no help, a heart no two-day period of miraculous cures could touch. Their puny ailments had been

relieved, but he was still at the slow, listless task of dying.

"Listen," said Watkins jubilantly, "whoever or whatever brought us here, it's a cinch they don't mean to harm us. They wouldn't mend us if they were going to hurt us, would they?"

"In two days," said Adam, nodding hard. "Two days! How could they do it?"

There was an air of near-gaiety about them that repelled Summersby. In a desperate rebellion against these boons handed out to everyone but himself, he tried to hurt them. "What do you do to a duck before you cook it? Clean it. Think that over."

Adam Pierce looked at him levelly. "No, sir. If that duck has sinus trouble or bad eyes, you don't have to fix that up before you eat it. No, sir."

"What about the Mexican?" Summersby asked. "What's happened to him?"

Then the wall slid open again and they all started forward; Summersby looked after them bitterly, feeling the resentment drain out and leave only the old hopelessness, the apathetic disregard of everything but death.

II

Porfirio Villa had known from the first that this adventure of his was a mistake. His wife had told him to stay off the roller

coaster, but he had sneered. What could happen? The people always got off again, laughing and wiping their brows. He had the bad burn on his left hand, caused by an accidental smacking of the steam table in a rage at his fool of a helper; — that idiot who now had had charge of the stand for two days! *Jodo feo!* — and so, enforced to a vacation, he must step into the cars and go crawling up that terrible incline, giggling nervously, and then rush madly down the other side. Dreaming is better than doing; he should have stayed in his chili stand and dreamed of the ride.

Por Dios! What a terror the rising, what a discomfort the drop, what a fearful thing the disappearance of the park and the awakening in this place . . . this place a man could not believe in, though he stood upon its floor and gazed round-eyed, with sweating lips and shaking hands, upon its size, its devices for unknown purposes, its impossible inhabitant!

The thing was twelve feet tall. Was it a machine? He had seen machines in the *revistas* and the cinema, looking much like this one, a clumsy copy of a man moving, speaking, tearing people to pieces. There was also King Kong, who resembled this thing.

If it was not alive, it moved very creditably. The gray-furred legs were long and thin, placed

on the sides of the body at the waist; the arms, much thicker than the legs, swung very low, and must be fully eight feet long. It was backing from him slowly, holding out one hand — six fingers and two thumbs, *demonio!* — with the green stick. That stick stung like a bee when it touched you.

The monster was already a good distance away. Porfirio cast his eyes slyly to one side, the other. There was a complication of machinery so great that even a teacher of mechanics would be dismayed.

There! A hole between two pink walls. He glanced once at the thing, standing now with its impossible face turned down to him, and then he ran for the hole.

It was after him with a short cry, but he reached the hole and scuttled through. Four paths faced him. What a time for decisions! He took the left-hand path, went round several turns, came to two more openings. The pink walls were smooth and featureless, well over his head so that he could not tell where he was. He ran like the mouse in the game next to his chili stand, the game in which suckers bet on which escape — the red, green, blue or white — the mouse would choose. Paths opened and Porfirio plunged on, losing his sense of direction, becoming more terrified as he went. His famished guts

dragged him down, made him a weak frightened mouse indeed.

He panted past two doorways and abruptly, like the flashing of a pigeon's wing, the greenstick shot down before him, held in that monstrous gray hand!

The stick appeared and disappeared, herding him, chivvying him from place to place, all places looking alike, till finally the great room lay again before his eyes. Whimpering, he stepped out of the pink maze and leaned against the wall, his chest and belly heaving. He was done. Let it murder him. A man could not run forever.

The brute stood over him. Cautiously it brought its face down to peer. Its eyes were set in deep pits, there was a hole between them, and far below in the watermelon-shaped head, a mouth like a man's with lips the color of rust on iron.

Panting, he gazed at it, then flung up one arm in a futile blow that fell short by two feet. The thing was angering him. Let it watch out for itself!

A hand, unnoticed, had crept round behind him and now took him by the back of the shirt, belt, and trousers, and lifted him off the floor. He regretted the useless punch. Now he would be dead.

The monster inspected him, prodding aside his bedraggled collar points and digging gently at his belly with the rod, which

did not sting him this time. It made a sound from its mouth like the last weak hellow of a dying *toro* — "Mmwaa gnaa!" then set him down once more with a thump that jolted his teeth, nearly fractured his ankles.

María y José, but it moved as fast as a lizard's tongue! Escape was beyond hope.

It backed away from him, stood by a huge box and gestured with the green stick. It wanted him to come. He walked toward it. The box was enormous, oblong, like a huge shoe box. Only when he had come to it did he realize it was the room in which he had awakened earlier.

In this hall it was lost. Untouched by the monster, he looked at the hall with seeing eyes for the first time. It had yellow walls and a gray roof, like the box. He clapped a hand to his head. Like a theater without seats! Over ten varas high, thirty broad and forty long; or he should say, being a man of the States now for many years, roughly thirty feet by seventy-five by a hundred. Scattered here and there in staggering confusion were the machines, the gadgets, the unknown things. All colors he had ever seen were there. It was gaudy as the amusement park, but slicker and more fresh-looking.

The creature laid a hand on the box, and the wall began to slide open. He looked up, and it ges-

tured, telling him as plainly as words to go in. He was to enter again. It seemed as happy a thing to him as the breaking of a Christmas (piñata?).

He braced himself now. *He* had emerged, while *they* had cowered behind, refusing him aid. Worms that they were, he would show them the bearing of a hero, one who had braved mysterious dangers while all others trembled. He sucked in his belly, threw forward his chest, placed his fists carefully on his hips and strutted into the strawed room, turning his head proudly from side to side. He heard the wall close behind him.

The worms came crowding to him.

"What is it? What happened?"

Porfirio Villa, adventurer, laughed. The relief that washed through him was making him shake, his empty stomach still heaved after the panic, but from somewhere in his soul he dredged up the casual laugh. "Very little happened," he said. "Truly very little of interest."

III

Mrs. Full sat on the straw, twisting her hands together. She did not know she was doing it until she had to disentangle them to pull her skirt lower on her folded legs, and then she deliberately put one hand flat on

the floor so that she would not appear to be nervous. She wanted Calvin to be as proud of her in this terrible crisis as she was of him.

But Calvin was calm, at any rate; so she was impatiently proud of him.

"We've got to slam something into that opening next time the wall slides back," said Watkins. She nodded at him approvingly. There was a man who might be of some help.

"What do you think these creatures are, Mr. Watkins?" she asked quietly, though she felt like screeching the question.

"I haven't the least idea, ma'am."

"Freak gorillas," said Calvin.

"No, sir," said Adam. "I've been thinking. Wasn't the Java Ape Man about nine feet tall?"

"Five and a half's more like it," said Watkins. "At least that's how I remember it."

"Well, *some* fossil man was nine feet tall," said Adam dogmatically. "Couldn't that thing be one of them? There's plenty of places in the world where a race of people or animals could have developed without Homo sapiens being any the wiser. Now suppose they got hold of us?"

"How?" asked Calvin.

"Through people working for 'em. We might all have been doped and put on a plane and we might be on an island somewhere

now, or in the middle of a jungle, with these whatcha-may-call-'ems."

"How were we doped?" persisted Calvin.

"Gosh, I don't know that!"

"And what the devil do they want with us?" asked Watkins.

Mrs. Full did not hear what Adam said. She was wondering, with a cold horror, if the creatures were near enough human to desire white girls as — as mates. "Calvin, we've got to get home!" she cried.

"We will, dear." He patted her shoulder. "Don't you worry."

"Someone has to worry."

"We all are, ma'am," said the pleasant Watkins. "Except you, I guess, Summersby," he added accusingly.

Summersby stared at him, seemed about to speak, then looked away. She was afraid of this great man. He might be a lunatic, with that lined, tormented face.

"We might be in the East Indies somewhere," said Adam thoughtfully. "A plane could get us there from New York in a lot less than two days."

"Where are these East Indies?" asked Villa. Mrs. Full wished he would stop rubbing his stomach that way. It reminded her that she was very hungry.

"Someplace near Siam," said Adam vaguely. "Question is, if

we're there, or anyplace else for that matter, why are we?"

A number of reasons shot through Mrs. Full's mind, all of them too fantastic to suggest aloud. They might be potential mates for these incredible animals, or slaves, or food, or. . . . She was surprised at herself for thinking of such things; one would suppose she had been reared on a diet of sensational thrillers.

She rose and walked aside, ostensibly studying the green fountain (which augmented her suffering with its tinkling splash). "Oh, Calvin," she said.

He came over to her. "Yes, dear?"

"Calvin, I —" she halted unable to phrase her question. But he did it for her.

"I've been thinking: if there are — certain basic needs — I mean, if you find it necessary to —"

"I do, Calvin," she said gratefully.

"Oh. Well, there is the, hmm, sand box. I believe it's meant for such, ah, purposes."

"Calvin! In front of you, in front of these strangers?" She was shocked, and put up one hand to push nervously at her hair, which felt untidy.

"We'll ask them to turn their backs. After all, such things must be attended to."

"I'd rather die," she said, but not at all certainly.

"There are sacrifices to be made in this predicament, and modesty is one," he clipped out. "Er, gentlemen."

Watkins said, "I know, it just hit me too."

"What?"

"I've got to go to the john."

"Yes," said Calvin stiffly. "I suggest we retire to the farther end from the sand box, while one by one —"

"We could rig a screen or something, but there isn't anything to do it with," said Watkins. He walked away; despite his outspoken manner, he seemed to have the proper instincts.

Adam followed him. Summersby turned his back. Calvin looked at the Mexican. "Come along."

"Why?" asked Villa, raising his black brows. "What is there in a simple relieving of —"

Calvin strode to him, catching him by the nape, lifted him bodily from the floor, and sent him reeling after the others. He half-turned, then walked on, muttering, "*Crazy gringos!*" Calvin went and stood a little behind the others, his back to her.

The minutes following were interminable, horribly embarrassing. At last she touched his shoulder. "All right, Calvin," she whispered.

One by one the others used the sand box. By the time they were

through with the unspeakably primitive ritual, she had become almost inured to it, and considered herself to be admirably calm. There were unsuspected resources in her nature, she thought.

"When do you suppose they feed us?" asked Watkins. He was holding his tan briefcase under his left arm; he hadn't once laid it down. "I'm so empty I rattle."

"Soon," said Calvin firmly, and she felt reassured.

Summersby was standing by the door-wall, his great hands working along the seams of his trouser legs. A violent temper, held in check, thought Mrs. Pull. He was the worst of the problems facing them, except for the unknown animals.

Even as she looked at him, the wall opened again. This time no one jumped or shrieked, though she felt her breath hiss back over her tongue. Watkins said, "Well, Viva, here's your pal again."

The Mexican glared. Evidently the joke was a stale one to him. "My name is Villa, not Viva. I hope you get a good taste of that green stick, you little man!"

"Viva Villa," said Watkins. "Lead on. You know the way."

The awful arm came in like a hairy python, groping blindly with the rod.

Summersby, standing near the opening, was the first to be touched. It tapped him lightly, and he walked out of the room,

really very bravely, she thought. The rod discovered Adam. The boy backed up, too frightened to put on a show of boldness. The rod slapped him impatiently, and he yelled and darted forward into the other room. He and Summersby stood together, staring up at something that could not be seen from inside the prison box.

"It's electrical," said Calvin. "Like a bull prod."

"Yes, dear," she said automatically.

"We may as well go out. I don't want you shocked."

"All right, Calvin." She took his arm. Watkins had been caught and herded out. As they stepped forward after him, she glanced sideways at her husband. She would have liked to tell him she loved him, but it would have been too melodramatic. She pressed his arm tightly, affectionately. They walked out into the great hall.

Villa's cursory description had not prepared Calvin Full for the reality of the huge beings.

There were three of them. They stood absolutely motionless, grotesquely humanoid figures with smallish, sunken eyes fixed rigidly on the people some yards away. Then, as Calvin watched, two of them thrust out their hands holding the ball-tipped rods. The gestures were almost too swift to follow.

He stared at the central figure, and it gazed back with its withdrawn, pupilless, rust-red eyes. Its head was, as Villa had told them, the shape of a watermelon, with the eyes wide-set on either side of a gently agitating orifice that was probably a nostril. The mouth, very human in shape, with full lips the color of the eyeballs, was quite low in the face. There was a rough growth of gray-black hair on the crown of the big head and a fuzz of it, less dark, on the face itself. There seemed to be no ears.

Its body, long and thick, was dwarfed by the tremendous arms. Its feet were large, toeless, and flat; its legs joined smoothly to the trunk about halfway up. It wore clothing of a sort, which surprised Calvin Full, perhaps more than anything else about the being. There was a kind of short sleeveless jacket of amber color caught at the front by a long silver bar, and a white skirt worn under the legs, reaching from just below the hip joints to the bottom of the torso.

Its companions were almost identical with it, except for clothing of different hues and varying cut.

The thing in the middle now opened its mouth and made a noise that reminded Full of an off-key clarinet.

"Gpwk?" it said, with a rising inflection. "Hummr gpwk?"

Abruptly it came forward, its motions flowing and yet a bit jerky, its long legs carrying it rhythmically, but with a hint of gawkiness; Calvin thought of a galloping giraffe he and his wife had seen in a travelogue some nights before. It towered over them, bending at the hip joints.

"Steady, dear," he said.

"I'm all right," his wife said shakily, seeming just on the verge of screaming.

"Wish I could say the same," said Adam Pierce, the Negro boy. "What a specimen!"

"Look like anything to you?" asked Watkins.

"Hell, no. Unless it's something from Mars."

"Maybe we're on Mars," said Watkins conversationally, but no one responded.

It's as sensible a suggestion as the East Indian one, thought Calvin. He had not the slightest idea where they were, and he saw no sense in worrying over it until they had more information to build theories on.

The beast making no further move, his wife at last leaned toward him and said in his ear, "Calvin, can you tell what—I mean whether it's male or female?"

He studied it carefully. He couldn't even make a guess. He shook his head.

Then it reached forward its

stick and thrust it directly at Calvin's face. He backed off, startled and somewhat frightened. At once the thing touched Mrs. Full with the ivory ball, as if to separate her from the knot of men.

She cried out in pain, and Calvin leaped forward; he had a flash of the great paw coming at him with the prod aimed for his face again. It touched his forehead, he felt an intense shock, and then he was powerless to move.

His mind screamed, he could feel tiny muscles try sluggishly to crawl deep under his skin, but he was paralyzed where he stood in an attitude of charging; he knew his face must be twisted in horror and rage, but he could feel nothing. Only his mind and eyesight seemed wholly clear.

He saw his wife taken off, stumbling unwillingly and looking back at him over her shoulder. Watkins said, (Calvin could hear plainly, he found), "Watch it, he's falling!" Then the paralysis left him and he slumped as though all his bones had been extracted. Someone caught him under the arms, holding him up. He tried to move, but aside from rolling his eyes and lolling his tongue out, he was helpless.

Summersby, behind him, said, "Are his eyes open?"

"Yeah." Watkin's face appeared before him. "Poor guy looks half dead."

Calvin blinked and made a try at speech, but nothing came out but a flop-tongued drooling sound.

The two creatures remaining near them squatted down and observed them, making fragmentary noises to each other. Watkins started to walk after the third, which had escorted Mrs. Full across the wide room and was on the point of making her get onto a low platform on which were a number of structures of purple tubing and crimson boxes and varicolored small contrivances. One of the pair flicked its goad across his path.

Villa said, "Come back, you foolish, do you think you can take that stick?" He sounded furious, probably because he was afraid of the beasts becoming enraged.

Calvin made a wracking effort to say, "Let him go," for surely they couldn't stand callously by and see his wife undergo the Lord knew what tortures; but the sound he made was unintelligible.

Watkins said, "Blast it, Viva, we don't know what the thing might do to her."

"Come on back," said Summersby. "Do you want to get this?" He hefted the limp Full.

Calvin writhed and managed to move his hands up and down.

"He's gaining," said Watkins, coming back.

"Those rods pack a wallop," said Adam. "What sort of power

can they have in 'em? Seems to me they're away beyond our science."

"They're not hitched to batteries," said Watkins. "Say, look at all this machinery. If these animals built it, they're a pretty advanced race."

Mrs. Full was seated now on a large thing like a chrome-and-rubber chair, one of those modern abominations which she and Calvin so cordially detested. He could not see her face. The twelve-foot brute was moving its fingers before her, evidently telling her to do something. Calvin heard her say plaintively, "But what is it?"

Summersby hoisted him up and about then feeling began to come back to him with a sharp, unpleasant tingling of the skin. He said, "Help her!" quite distinctly.

"Nothing's happening to her," said Watkins. "Take it easy."

Mrs. Full was apparently pulling levers and moving blocks of vividly colored material back and forth on rods; like an abacus, thought her husband.

Suddenly one of the other pair of creatures gave a cry, "Brrm hmmm!" and pointed to the left. From a muddle of gear rose a small airship, orange, with a nose like a spaceship and streamlined fins, and a square box on its tail. It made no noise, but rose straight toward the ceiling, moving slowly, jerkily.

His wife had her back to it. He heard her give an exasperated, bewildered cry. "What on earth . . . what are you *doing*?" She spoke to the creature as if it understood. "I don't see why you —"

Calvin pushed free of Summersby. He could stand now, shakily. The beast indicated a blue block on a vertical bar; Mrs. Full moved it down, the airship halted and began to sail toward them. "Do you see the toy ship?" called Calvin. "You're flying the ship!"

"Oh, my," she said helplessly. "What shall I do now?"

"This is crazy," said Watkins. "Absolutely crazy."

"Go on moving things," Calvin called to his wife. "Experiment. It wants you to fly it." It occurred to him that this was too obvious to bother stating. He must be distracted by weakness. He rubbed his tingling arms and hands, hoping she wouldn't crash the ship. Villa and Adam Pierce were calling encouragement to her as the orange thing drifted up and down and sideways.

Now the twelve-foot being gestured briefly at a portion of the apparatus, Mrs. Full caught his meaning and moved something, and the ship tilted and flew along the wall without touching it. All three of the creatures uttered sounds that might be taken for words of pleasure.

"Good girl!" yelled Watkins. "Keep it up!"

She turned to them and Calvin saw she was smiling. "There's really nothing to it," she said. The airship bumped into the wall and fell. The animal above her squawked and pressed down a lever, which evidently sent out a beam or impulse that caught the ship in midair and held it suspended. Then it grasped Mrs. Full and carried her, flailing her limbs, over to the corner.

Calvin started forward, apprehensive.

"Hold it, Cal, you don't want another shock." Watkins took his arm.

The creature kicked aside a mound of small gadgets, sending them helter-skelter, picked up what looked like a big five-legged stool and set it on its feet. It was perhaps ten feet high. Then he deposited Mrs. Full on its smooth round top and turned her bodily so that she faced the wall.

"Help her!" snapped Calvin.

"We can't do a damn thing."

"Just wait a minute, sir," said Adam. "He's leaving her alone. I don't think he'll hurt her."

She twisted her head around, looking frightened. Her legs hung over the edge. The being strode back with its curious gawky-graceful walk, and firmly turned her face to the wall again, using one big rubbery finger. "Oh!" she said, in a small voice, and re-

mained staring at the wall, like a naughty child on a dunce's stool. The beast came over to the group.

The three talked among themselves, glancing at the men. The airship hung on its invisible beam of energy, ignored. Mrs. Full patted up her hair. She must be terrified, thought Calvin.

The three came to them, their skirts swishing like taffeta. They knelt — it was an odd movement, their high-hipped legs angling to the sides, their bodies slanting forward as their heads dropped toward the humans — and stared at one and then another. The one who was evidently the leader put out his green goad, but slowly, as if showing no harm was intended, and pushed at Calvin's jacket. The ivory ball touched his chest but no shock followed. The thing made noises, perhaps comparing his clothing with its own.

"Take it off, Cal," said Watkins.

"Why?"

"He'd like to see it. Be friendly."

"That's it," agreed Adam, "be friendly."

He removed his jacket and handed it to the brute, who received it dubiously, fingered it, exhibited it to the other two, and dropped it. Calvin bent to pick it up; the goad barred his way. Two large fingers plucked at his trousers. He felt himself flush with outrage.

"No!"

Watkins chuckled. "I'll bet you will."

"Don't make it mad," said Adam.

"I won't take my trousers off."

"If we took them off, it might soothe this monster," suggested Villa. "Let us throw him down and take off his pants."

"Try it," said Calvin. The Mexican started toward him. Then the creature had lifted him high in the air, peering closely at the trousers. It tugged at them. "Ouch!" said Calvin. The beast would tear them off; the humiliation of that would be worse than removing them himself. It might rip them to shreds. He loosened his belt and unbuttoned and unzipped just in time; they came off over his shoes and were held up in front of the sunken red eyes. Calvin was set down, carefully enough, and the garment was handed to the other monstrosities. Calvin cast a look at the stool. He was glad his wife was not witnessing his shame.

"Nice shorts," said Villa.

Full whirled on him, angry enough to bark out an insult, even an oath, but the man was evidently sincere in his praise. "Thank you," he said stiffly.

His trousers were thrown to him and he shoved his feet into them and secured them once more. He put on his jacket.

One of the beasts which had not taken an active part in the business now walked to Mrs. Full and picked her up by the back of the waist, as though she had been a cat, and brought her over. For one ghastly moment Calvin thought it was going to divest her of her skirt, but after scrutinizing her a while, it set her down among them.

He took her hand. "Are you all right, dear?"

She was amazingly calm. "I am, Calvin, I am. I don't believe they mean us any harm, after all."

The first great animal pointed at the box, waving his prod.

"We're supposed to go in again, I guess," said Watkins.

"Let's go, then," said Adam. "No sense in getting shocked."

They trooped in, and the wall closed behind them.

IV

Adam Pierce had an idea. It had begun to grow in his mind while the woman was running the miniature spaceship, but he had thought it over until he was certain it wasn't so silly as to make them laugh at him. Now he felt sure he'd hit on the truth; too many evidences for it, and nothing much that he could see against it.

"I have an idea," he said.

"To get out?" asked the woman.

"No, ma'am. I think I know where we are."

"Where?" asked everyone, except the big man, Summersby, who was sitting on the tire looking away from them.

"In a lab! This is a laboratory, and those big things are some kind of scientists!"

"You could be right," said Watkins reluctantly. "My God, what a spot, if you're right!"

"Sure. That's why we were snatched off the coaster, however it happened. They wanted to experiment on us, and study us. They got this lab someplace where it's secret, and they make tests—"

"There was a contrivance like a milking machine," said Full.

"You don't know *what* it's used for," said Adam darkly. He imagined it might be an especially nasty way of picking over a man's brains or body. "Look, it all fits. That stool, that's a funny way to punish a person, but all their stuff is a little cockeyed."

"By our standards," added Watkins.

"That's what I meant. Look, you punish a guinea pig when it does something wrong, if you're trying to teach it some trick or other; I mean, suppose you want to determine its intelligence, you give it a problem, and if it does the thing wrong it gets a shock, maybe, or a bat on the nose. That stool was punishment. If you hadn't crashed the rocket," he

said to Mrs. Full, "it might have given you a reward."

"Maybe some food," said Villa.

"Here's another angle," said Watkins, who obviously knew something about lab work. "They may be trying to give us neuroses. Scientists induce neuroses in all kinds of critters, by punishment and complex problems and —"

"What is that?" asked Villa.

"Neuroses?" Watkins rubbed his chin. "Well, say they want to make an animal nervous, anxious, worried." Villa nodded.

"You mean they might be trying to drive us mad?" said the woman in a high scared voice.

"I doubt it," said Calvin Full.

"They might be," said Watkins.

"Then let's get out of here," said his wife. She went trotting to the wall. "Didn't anyone shove a barrier into this?"

"I forgot," said Full. She gave him a dirty look.

"Anyway," Adam went on, "that could explain why we were fixed up before they woke us — it was like quarantine. They wouldn't want sick animals."

"Who was fixed up how?" asked the Mexican suspiciously.

"My astigmatism," he said to Villa, "and this gentleman's sinus trouble, and his wife's headache."

"And they pulled a rotten wisdom tooth for me," said Watkins. "I just discovered it a minute ago. Hole's healed up neatly."

Villa was peeling away the bandage on his hand. Now he gave a glad shout. "*Madre de Dios!* Look, the burn has gone!" He showed them his hand. "Tuesday, a terrible scorched place; today, behold, it is well!"

The woman said, "You know, this might be a laboratory. When I taught kindergarten we had simple tests for the children that were somewhat like that remote control apparatus."

Watkins pushed the big man, Summersby, on the shoulder. "I wish you'd get into this," he said irritably. "We need all the brains we have to get out."

Summersby looked at him. "You think we'll get out?" he asked.

"Why not?"

"Why?" Summersby sounded tired, and as if his mind was a long way off. "If these are scientists, they'll keep a fairly close watch on their lab animals."

"You're a forest ranger, man. Don't you have to meet emergencies all the time?" Watkins was exasperated. Adam thought, I wouldn't talk to the big fellow that way; he looks as wild as a panther.

"I'm sorry," said Summersby, turning away again. "I don't think we can escape, or plan to, until we have more information."

"You needn't inflict your morbidity on us," said Full. "Be-

cause you're a defeatist is no reason for us to be."

Summersby stood up. He looked as tall to Adam as one of the monsters. "If we're guinea pigs, we'll end up as guinea pigs," he said. "And what do experimenters do with guinea pigs, finally? They infect or dissect them. Now leave me alone!" He walked to the farthest corner and sat down on the straw, staring at his feet.

Adam reached up automatically to push at his glasses, found them missing, and was confused for an instant. Then he said, "There's a thought. We better bust out as quick as we can."

"Summersby won't help," said Watkins. "Anybody else feel fatalistic about this mess?"

"I must get back to my chili stand," said Villa. "And my wife," he added.

"Adam, you're nearer to college courses than I am," said Watkins. Adam nodded. "How many places in the world are there, big enough and unexplored enough to hide a race of giants like these?"

"I guess parts of Africa and South America, maybe the Arctic, some islands. I don't really know."

"Neither do I."

"Perhaps we aren't on the earth at all," said Mrs. Full. They all looked at her. "I read a book once in which a party of people discovered a land beneath the earth's surface," she went on, actually blushing a little. "It was a trashy

sort of book, but — but I thought possibly there might be something in the idea."

"There might," said her husband.

"Wherever we are, we've got to get out of this box before we do anything else," said Adam. He felt panicky, as the realization sank into him of what they might be in for, in this alien lab, under the care of scientists that looked more like apes than anything.

"Look!" shouted Villa. Adam whirled and saw the small panel, that Watkins had discovered earlier, just sliding open. A large platter came through, heaped with what looked like a collection of junk. The huge hand which had pushed it in withdrew, the panel slipping shut after it. Villa was the first to reach the platter. "Santas," he muttered. "Santas y santas!"

The platter was two feet square, of sky-blue plastic, and on it lay seven pies, several dozen cupcakes, a double handful of macaroon cookies, and a quantity of glass shards. Some of the pies were upside down.

"What on earth . . ." said Mrs. Full.

"Looks like the contents of a bakery window," said Watkins, leaning over with his briefcase clamped to his thin chest. "Window and all, I might add."

Villa picked up a custard pie.

It had been smeared up by rough handling but it looked good to Adam. He chose one for himself, and Watkins handed Mrs. Full an apple pie. She thanked him. They all took tentative bites.

"What do you make of this?" Watkins asked Summersby, still trying to drag him into their group. The big man shrugged. "The glass," went on the blond fellow, "that doesn't make sense. Do they think we eat glass?"

"Possibly," said Calvin Full.

Among the six of them, they consumed all the eatable contents of the tray. Almost immediately Adam felt his eyelids drooping. "I'm sleepy," he said, yawning.

"So am I," said Villa. He lay prone and closed his eyes at once.

Adam sat down, more heavily than he had meant to. He was vaguely disturbed by the sudden tiredness.

"Someone ought to stand guard," said Mrs. Full.

"I will," said Summersby unexpectedly.

"I'll do it," said Watkins. He started to pace up and down. "I'm a little groggy myself, but I'll take first trick."

V

When they were let out of their prison box next morning — nine o'clock Friday, by the chronograph, and they had slept another fifteen hours — there were five

of the gigantic beast-creatures waiting for them. Any hopes that Tom Watkins had had of rooting around the big hall for a way of escape died with a dejected grunt. There must be well over a ton of enemies there, with their caverned red eyes peering down at the humans. No chance to explore under those gazes.

The boss of the alien scientists — Watkins recognized it, or him (or was it her?), by the clothing and by certain differences in facial structure — came and bent over them. Watkins was smoking a cigarette he had bummed from Villa, Summersby's having given out the day before. He took a hearty drag and blew out the smoke, which unfortunately lifted right into the creature's eyes. It shook its head and made a squawking sound, "Hwrak!" and flipped its green prodger into his belly. He abruptly sat down, with the sensation of having stuck his finger into a lamp socket. "My God!" he said. Cal helped him up.

Summersby walked off toward a twenty-foot-high door. None of the beings tried to stop him. The boss motioned Watkins to go with it, so he rather shakily followed it across the room.

Before him was a gadget that resembled a five-manual organ console. The banks of keys were broad and there was a kind of chair, or stool, fixed on a horizontal bar in front of them. The

giant indicated that he was to get onto it.

"Now what?" he said, when he had been stopped directly in front of the apparatus. "Expect me to play this? Look, Buster, I'm tone deaf, I haven't had my coffee yet, and I'd just as soon dance a polka as play you a tune."

The thing pressed down two of the keys—they were of an amethyst color, longer and more tapered than those of an organ—and looked at Watkins.

"Drop dead," he said to it. He was always bitterly antagonistic to everything and everybody if he didn't have three cups of coffee before he got out of bed. "Go on, you big ape, make me play."

It hit him on the head with a couple of its big rubbery fingers. He felt as if a cop had sloshed him with a blackjack, and all the hostility went out of him. He leaned forward and pushed down half a dozen keys at random.

There was no sound, at least none that he could hear, though he remembered the whistle he had at home to call his dog, and wondered if the notes of this organ were sub- or supersonic. Certainly there was no reason to suppose this race of creatures was limited to the same range of hearing that humans were.

The thing went down the hall some yards and folded itself into a sitting position before a large

white space on the wall. When Watkins did nothing, it gestured angrily with its goad. He pressed more keys. It jerked its head around and stared at the white space.

Accidentally he discovered that by pressing with his calves on certain pedals below the stool he could maneuver the seat to either side. The gadget began to intrigue him.

He had never played any musical instrument, but had always had a quiet desire to produce music. He couldn't hear this organ's sounds, but he could go through the motions with fervor. He did.

The boss scientist gazed raptly at the wall screen; was it concentrating on what he played? Did his random selection of keys indicate something to it, something about his mental powers or emotions or — what?

Or was it possible that the playing produced images or colors on the blank space? He craned his neck, but could distinguish nothing. Pounding on, he called over his shoulder, "Come here, somebody!"

No one answered. Pushing keys at random, he turned to look for them. Each of them was doing something under the supervision of a twelve-foot beast, except for Summersby, who was still examining the door. "Hey, High-pockets!" he yelled, knowing the



Tom O'Sullivan

Illustrator: Tom O'Sullivan

big man hated the nickname, but not giving a damn. "Summersby! Come here!"

"What is it?" said Summersby in a moment, standing below his seat.

"Take a squint at that screen the old boy's gazing at. I want to know what the devil I'm doing."

Summersby walked over and stood beside the scientist.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Well, the screen's mottled gray and white, and the pattern's swirling slowly; but that's all."

"Is it particularly beautiful?" asked Watkins.

"No. It's hardly distinguishable."

Sliding right and left on the bar, striking first one and then another of the manuals, Watkins said to Summersby, "What do you figure these scientists are, anyway?"

"Manimals," said the big man.

"I suppose so."

"They have navels. They weren't hatched."

"Oh." Watkins hadn't noticed that. "Where are we, then?"

"I don't know."

Another scientist wandered over and sat down beside the first. Shortly they seemed to get in each other's way, and there was a lot of shoving and squawking.

At last one of them hit the other in the face with an open hand. Then they were rolling on the floor, snatching at one another's hair and pummeling the big bodies and heads with those gargantuan fists. It sounded like a brawl between elephants. Watkins swiveled round to watch. Mrs. Full said to someone. Watkins heard her distinctly in a hush in the ruckus. "If these are scientists, what are the common people like?" For the first time that day he grinned. He had stopped playing the organ. The other scientists had gathered around the fight and were uttering strange cries, like wild geese honking. Cheering them on? he wondered.

Adam came over. "Mr. Watkins," he said, "could we have been wrong about them? Do you think a scientist would act like that?"

"They sure seem to be a quarrelsome race, Adam," he said, "they're not noticing what we do. Suppose you go look for a way out."

"We want to get away as soon as we can," nodded the boy. "Dangerous around here." He ran down the hall.

The giants arose and straightened their clothing. They had patched up their argument in the midst of fighting over it. The leader walked toward a tall device of pipes and boards and steps; motioning Mrs. Full to follow.

Apparently Watkins had been forgotten. He took his briefcase off his lap, where he had held it all the time he played, and dropped it to the floor. Then he hung by his hands and let go. He picked up the case and went to investigate the room.

Before he had done more than glimpse the enormous door, he was picked up kitten-fashion by a scientist, who carried him off, dangling and swearing, to another infernal machine.

For a couple of hours they were put through paces, all of them; sometimes one man would be working a gadget while all the scientists and humans watched him, at other periods they would each be hard at work doing something the result of which they had no conception of.

Several of the machines could be figured: the pink maze, one or two others; and Watkins had at least a theory on the organ. The sleek modernistic machinery which directed the airship was plain enough. There were certain designs and arrangements to follow that flew it up and down the room. They were hard to memorize but Mrs. Full and the somber ranger, Summersby, became adept at them.

Then there were the others. . . .

There was a remote control device that played "music," weird haunting all-but-harmonies that

sounded worst when the creatures appeared most pleased, and earned the punishment stool or a brutal cuffing for the operator when he did manage to produce something resembling a tune. Evidently bearing a relation to this was the sharp slap Adam got when he started to sing "The Whiffenpoof Song" while idling around a pile of outsize blocks like a child's building bricks. What the human ear relished, the giant ear flinched from.

There was a sort of vertical maze that verged on the four-dimensional, for when they thought they were finding a way out the top they would come abruptly to the side, or even the bottom, and have to begin anew. This one was obviously impossible to figure out, thought Watkins. It must be one of the ways in which the scientists induced neuroses in their experimental subjects. He had a quick mind for puzzles and intricacies of any kind, but this one stumped him cold.

"You think it's calculated to drive you crazy?" he asked Cal.

The New Englander considered for a minute. Then he nodded. "Possibly," he said.

"You think it might work?"

This time Cal pondered longer. At last he said, "Not if we don't let it."

"I could develop a first-class neurosis," said Watkins to Mrs.

Full, "if I let myself really go."

"We must all keep our heads, Mr. Watkins," she told him. "Those of us who have not given up—" She glanced at Summersby with a frown—"must hold a tight rein-on-ourselves."

"That's right, ma'am," he said. They all called her "ma'am" or "Mrs. Full." Nobody knew her first name. He wondered if she'd be insulted if he asked her, and decided that she would.

Capriciously, then, on the heels of a series of punishments, the head scientist went out of the room and came back with food for them. It flung the food—three chickens—on the floor. Villa snatched one of them up with a happy shout, but at once his dark face soured. "Raw? How can we cook them?" His hand with the fowl dropped limply to his side.

"We can make a fire," said Calvin. Watkins was a little surprised that it was Cal who made the suggestion first, but the Vermont man added, "I've made enough campfires to know something about it."

"Mr. Full is an enthusiastic hunter," said his wife.

"A fire of what?" asked Villa, managing to look starved, helpless, and wistful, all at once.

Summersby said, "There are plates of plastic over there, and plenty of short rods. I don't know what these beasts use them for,

but if they're fireproof, we can construct a grill with them." He went without further talk to a stack of the multicolored slabs and dowels, which lay beside a neat array of what looked like conduit pipes, electromagnets, and coiled cable. He picked up an armload. One of the giants put a hand down before him. He pushed it aside and strode back to the group. Gummy, thought Watkins, or just hungry? Or is it his sense of kismet?

"I'll cut some kindling from the trees in our room," said Calvin. "Who has a knife?"

Summersby handed him a large pocket knife, and set about making a grill over two of the plastic slabs. It was a workmanlike job when he had finished. He held his lighter under one of the rods, which was apparently impervious to fire. He nodded to himself. Looks more human, thought Watkins, than he has yet.

Villa was plucking one of the chickens, humming to himself. Mrs. Full was working on another, Adam on the third. Watkins felt useless, and sat down, running his fingers along the smooth side of his briefcase.

Cal made a heap of chips and pieces of wood and bark under the grill. Summersby lit it. The giants, who were grouped around them at a few yards' distance, mumbled among themselves as the shavings took flame. The plucked and

drawn fowls were laid on the grill. Watkins' mouth began to water.

"Now if we only had some coffee," he said to Adam. "One lousy pot of greasy-spoon coffee!"

VI

"I have seen you," said Villa to Adam, who was gnawing on a drumstick. "You wear the wig and a bone in the nose, and a tiger-skin around you."

"Sure," said Adam. "I'm the Wild Man from Zululand. It's one job where my color's an advantage."

"A fine job!" said Villa. "You should have come down to my stand. The best chili in New York."

"I had a bowl there last week. Without my make-up, I mean."

"I will give you a bowl free when we go home. With tacos," added Villa generously.

"It's good stuff," said the boy.

Calvin Full wiped his fingers and his lips on a handkerchief. He looked about at the hall, through which the giants had now scattered; some of them were tinkering with the machines, others were simply loitering, as if bored by the whole matter of scientific research. They had lost their early wariness of the humans, and did not carry the green goads, but kept them tucked into holsters at the back of their swishing skirts.

One of them removed the blond man, Watkins, and set him to doing something with a pipe-and-block apparatus. The processes they went through with their strange mechanical and electrical gadgets, the end results they achieved, were a mystery to Calvin. And as the afternoon wore on, their conduct as a whole became even more mysterious. It was, from human standards, totally irrational. One would begin a test, analysis, or whatever it might be; he would follow it through its devious windings to its ambiguous result, or to no result, and suddenly leave it to begin something else, or come to watch the humans perform.

The longer he observed their conduct, the more worried he became. Finally, after a good bit of hiding and spying, he found out something which he had been trying to figure for hours; and then it seemed time for him to talk to someone about their escape.

The blond man had been peering into his briefcase. He zipped it shut quickly as Calvin approached, with a kind of guilty movement. What does he have in there? Calvin wondered.

"Mr. Watkins," he said, rubbing his chin and wishing he had a razor, "did you ever see a scientist, or laboratory assistant, skip from one thing to another as these creatures do?"

"I never did."

"Nor did I. They don't take care of their equipment, either; several times one or another has kicked down a neat pile of gear, and once I distinctly heard something break."

"It might be junked machinery," suggested Watkins.

"I doubt it."

One of the giants made a raucous noise — *Brang!*

"And how irritable they are, in addition to their capriciousness and sloppiness! I can't imagine a race of emotional misfits producing equipment of such complexity. Their science is beyond ours in many ways, yet look at this place." He made a broad gesture. "When we were let out this morning, it was clean and well ordered. I've inspected dairies that were far dirtier. Now it's a hodge-podge of scattered materials, upset stacks of gear, tipped-over instruments. What sort of mind can bear such confusion?"

Watkins smiled. "The minds that conceived — well, that vertical maze, for instance — must be orderly after a fashion, even though it isn't the human fashion."

"This is far from what I wanted to say, though. Have you been noticing the door?"

"There isn't much to notice. It's a sliding panel like our wall."

"When one of the creatures leaves, he passes his right hand

across what is evidently an electric eye beam, as nearly as I can place it about ten or eleven feet off the floor. That opens the door."

"Good going, Cal!" said Watkins. "I hadn't seen 'em do it."

"Our try for escape should be made as soon as possible," went on Calvin in a low voice. "As we've talked about, the object of these tests and experiments may be to infect us with neuroses —" Watkins grinned again — "I know my phrasing isn't right," said Calvin stiffly, "but I never looked into such matters. There's also Summersby's suggestion about the fate of guinea pigs. So I think we'd better try to get out right away."

"With five of them here?"

"If we have any luck, we may find an opportunity, yes. Occasionally they get absorbed in something, and that door makes no noise."

Watkins looked at his briefcase uncertainly. "Okay," he said finally. "May as well try it. Though God knows where we are when we do get out of the lab."

Calvin congratulated himself on his choice of an ally. "Good man," he said.

In the next hour they managed to build a crude platform beside the door, of various boxlike things, nondescript plastic blocks and impedimenta. The giants didn't even look at them. They were, in-

deed, a strange race. Now the platform was high enough so that Calvin felt he could reach the opening ray.

Summersby wandered over. "What are you doing?" he asked, seeming to force out the question from politeness, not curiosity.

"We're going to make a break. Highpockets," said Watkins. "Want to help?"

"They won't let you," said the big man.

"We can try, can't we?" asked Watkins hotly.

"It's your neck."

"Listen, you may be the size of a water buffalo, but if Cal and Adam and I piled on you, you'd go down all right. Why don't you cooperate?"

Summersby stared at him a moment and Calvin thought he was going to say something, something that would be important; but he shrugged and went across the hall and into the prison box.

"What's eating that big bastard, anyway?" said Watkins.

Calvin believed he knew, but it was not his secret; it was Summersby's. He said nothing.

"Watch it," said Watkins. "They're coming." The two men scurried behind their rampart. The five giants marched, flat-footed, down the hall, their thick arms swinging. The door opened and all of them went out. It closed behind them.

"How about that!" said Wat-

kins exultantly, a grin on his face.

"I'll get Mrs. Full and the others," said Calvin. He felt a tingle of rising excitement. "Get up there and be ready to open it. We'll give them five minutes and then make our break."

"Right." Watkins was already clambering up the boxes and blocks.

Calvin almost ran to his wife. She was standing in front of the color organ. "Dear," he said, and halted.

"Yes, what is it, Calvin?"

"I don't know. I was going to say —"

A sluggishness was pervading his body, a terrible lassitude crept through his brain. What was it? What was happening?

"I was going to —"

He caught her as she slumped, but could not hold up her weight, and sank to the floor beside her. His eyes blinked a couple of times. Then knowledge and sensation vanished together.

VII

Tom Watkins awoke slowly. He had a cramp in one arm from sleeping on it, but otherwise he was conscious of a comfortable, healthy feeling, which told him he'd slept well and long. He stretched and brushed a few pieces of straw from his face.

Straw?

He suddenly remembered sit-

ting down on their platform, very sleepy and worried because of the abruptness of it.

He sat up. Summersby had just stood, yawning. "Did you carry me in here?" he asked the big man.

"I was going to ask you that."

"Christ! What happened?" He was wholly awake now. "Did you drop off out in the lab?"

"Yeah."

"So'd I," said Adam. He was sitting next to the Mexican, whom he now pushed gently. "You okay, Porfirio?"

Villa erupted with a grunt. The Fulls were looking at each other owlishly.

And then it hit him. Watkins twisted, cased the floor, and saw nothing but straw and fountain and tree trunks. He was literally staggered, and nearly lost his balance.

His briefcase was gone!

He stared about wildly, panic lifting in him like a swift debilitating disease. Then he took four fast steps and grabbed Summersby by the coat. It was queer, but he didn't even think of anyone else having taken it. Summersby towered over him, but he could be brought down.

"Okay, you skyscraper," said Watkins, "where'd you put it?"

"Put what?"

"My case! Where is it?"

"I never touched your damned case."

Well, Watkins could smile honestly, and here it was. That startled amazement was genuine. He glared at Adam Pierce, Villa, the Fulls. Not that last pair, surely! As rock-ribbed and staunchly honest as their New England coasts, and about as imaginative. Not the colored boy, either, a good kid; and he didn't think it was Villa.

"We must have been carried in here by the scientists," said Adam rationally. "Maybe they left it outside."

That was logical. But he'd had a death-grip on the handle when he fell asleep, just as he always did. He looked at them all again. He went from wall to wall, kicking the straw. Then he scowled at the sand box, the only place a thing that size could be stashed away. He was suddenly on his knees, tossing sand left and right.

Avoiding certain places, he checked the pile. Nothing! Not a scrap of leather or a piece of green paper!

"If you are through," said Villa heavily, "I wish to use the box."

"Go ahead, Viva." Watkins walked across the room, groping for a cigarette, then remembering he had none left. "What happened out there?" he asked loudly. "Were we doped? Something in the chickens?"

"We were awake for a long time after we ate," said Adam. "Not even these people could make a drug act on six of us in the same

minute, after that long; too many differences in metabolism. If that's the word I want."

"They weren't even in the room when we dropped off," said Mrs. Full.

That was a tip-off. Watkins momentarily forgot his great loss. "They left, and in a minute, we were asleep. They must have pumped some sort of gas into the lab. Sleep gas."

"Is there such a thing?" asked Cal. "An anesthetic vapor that would permeate such a large place so quickly?"

"Is there such a thing as a four dimensional maze?" asked Adam shortly.

Watkins grinned. He wasn't the only one who needed his morning coffee.

Then he thought of his briefcase again. He tried to push the moving wall to one side; no go. He got mad again. "It's no good to them," he said. "What do they want with it?"

"It couldn't have been so important that—" began Full.

"Important?" Watkins was yelling now, and although he disliked raising his voice and making scenes, he did it now, with furious pleasure. "Cal, you never saw anything more important in your life than that case, and I don't care how many blue-ribboned cows you've gaped at!"

"What was in it?" asked Villa.

"Money, goddammit, money!" It didn't matter if his secret came out now. In this insane place, God knew where, the cautious habits of half a lifetime slid away. "The best haul I'd made this year. The contents of the safe of Roscoe & Bates, that's what was in it! Better than twenty-two thousand in good, green cash!"

"The contents of a safe?" Calvin Full frowned. "You mean you were a messenger, taking it somewhere, and got on that roller coaster with —"

Adam Pierce laughed abruptly. "No, he wasn't a messenger," he said. "He wasn't any messenger. He's a safe-cracker. Mr. Watkins, what good do you think it'd do you in here?"

"We'll get back."

"You're a safe-cracker?" asked Mrs. Full, her pale face lengthening with horror, disgust, and fear. "A criminal?"

"In a manner of speaking, ma'am," said Tom Watkins, "I am."

"I'll be hanged," said Summersby. "And you accused me of stealing your loot. I ought to butter you all over the wall."

"You try it, you overgrown galoot. I didn't do a hitch in the Philippines for nothing." Watkins smoothed back his hair, which was dangling into his eyes. "Sure, I'm a safe man. Don't worry, Mrs. Full, that doesn't mean I'm a thug." She looked scared.

"That's right," said Adam, still chuckling. "This boy's the aristocracy of crime. You don't have to worry about your purse. He only plays around with big stuff."

Tom flipped him a grin. "I'll bet you even know why I was on the copster."

"Sure. You were hiding out."

"That's it. If I kept out of sight till dark I was okay. They were out for me, because my touch is known; but who'd think of checking an amusement park?" He turned as Cal made a noise in his throat. The Vermonter was a study in outraged sensibilities.

"You — you swine," he said, a typical Victorian hero facing the mustache-twisting villain. "You stole that money —"

"My morals and your morals, Cal," said Watkins as genially as he could, "are probably divergent, but it doesn't make a whale of a difference now, does it?"

Full turned to his wife and began to mutter to her.

Villa said, "I don't like crooks, I run a respectable stand and I am an honest man," and scratching his hand where the healed burn was, he turned away likewise. Summersby was sitting on the tire, and only Adam looked sympathetic. The boy wasn't crooked, that was plain, but Watkins had the glamor that a big-time thief has for the young, the fake aura of Robin-Hoodism.

He shook his head. He'd had to spill it. For a while they'd trusted him and now he was a pariah.

The food panel opened and something plumped in. Watkins glanced at his chronograph. Ten o'clock Saturday. He went over to the food.

It was a big, glossy chocolate-brown vulture with a blue head.

"Well," said Adam. "Well, now, I don't know."

"They pulled a boner this time," said Watkins. "Unless it's part of the conditioning."

Villa picked it up. "It weighs many pounds. It's warm, just killed. I don't want any of it." He dropped it on the straw. "With my spices, perhaps; but not cooked on that grill, without sauce and spice. Aargh!"

Watkins thought, Amen to that. He rubbed the sandy bristles on his chin. No razor or soap here. It dawned on him that he was thirsty, and he went to the fountain. As it always did when he bent over to drink, the curious web of silver strands in the corner caught his eye. There were so many puzzles about this damned lab that he despaired of ever solving all of them.

After fifteen minutes, the wall opened. They went out, Villa carrying the vulture. He flung it at the feet of the chief scientist, who was there with two associates.

"No!" he bellowed up at it.

"We do not eat this!" He articulated slowly, clearly, as though to a foreigner with a slim knowledge of English. It picked up the great bird and regarded it closely, then without warning threw it at one of the other giants.

The vulture caught it on the side of the head and knocked it off balance; falling to its knees, it bleated out an angry sound and dived for the boss' legs. They went down together in a gargantuan scrimmage that made the humans dance backward to avoid being smashed by the thick swinging arms.

Tom Watkins walked off, unimpeded, to look for his briefcase. It was nowhere in the lab. He cursed bitterly. Twenty-two grand, up the spout.

The head scientist, having chastised the other, left the room; Watkins had a glimpse of another fully as large, with something like a big table therein. Shortly the creature returned, carrying in one arm a load of wood chips, and in the other a bulgy, leathery thing that turned out to be a partially stunned octopus, still dripping the waters of an unknown ocean.

They killed it, rebuilt their grill (larger this time), and cut up the octopus and cooked and ate it. It wasn't as bad as Watkins had feared.

After a dragging day, they were locked into their box — no one had a chance to gimmick the wall,

for the giants were watching them closely — and shortly afterward a load of raw vegetables was dumped in.

Watkins paced the floor after he had eaten, waiting for the sleep gas, determined to combat it if he could. When the drowsiness came, he walked faster. It didn't do any good. He knew he was sinking to the floor. Powerful stuff, he said to himself, very powerful st —

Mrs. Pull kept close to Calvin all through Sunday. They had been here since Thursday, all these men without women, and she knew there were men who had to have women frequently or they became vicious and could not be stopped by any thought of consequences. The Mexican seemed all right, but you never knew with a person from a Latin country.

Another facet of the same problem was the fact that she and Calvin were supposed to be on their honeymoon. She faced it; she was frustrated. She wanted a honeymoon, no matter what sort of prison they were in. So after their first meal on Sunday, she asked Calvin to fix up a private apartment in their prison.

With various materials, plastic blocks and the different sizes of slabs, and some screens of translucent fabric she had dug up in a corner, he made a walled-off

compartment just large enough for two.

Then one of the scientists looked in, saw what he was doing, and promptly knocked it down.

Adam, who had been helping in the latter stages, squinted at the ceiling of the box. "You know, Mrs. Full, I think they can see us through that. If it's opaque to us, it still might be transparent to them; like a mirror, I mean, I've seen them at home, mirror on one side, window from the other. That'd explain the light we get in here. And if they want to observe us all the time, then this private cell of yours would make 'em mad."

"But it had no roof," she objected.

"That's right." He shook his head. "Another theory gone poof."

"I'll build it again," said Calvin stubbornly, and did so. This time the giants left it alone. He and Adam made a screen for the sand box too, and built a permanent grill on one side of the box.

VIII

By Tuesday they were all in a state of anxiety and scotcreely-contained rage. Their surveillance was casual, often non-existent, yet not once had they been able to block the wall of their prison or open the great door of the laboratory. Circumstances, chance, fate, whatever you wanted

to call it, something had stopped them every time.

There were three giants in the lab today. Sometimes there would be one of them, sometimes as many as five; but always there would be the one who had first removed them from the box, who seemed to be the head scientist, giving orders, bullying the others in the queer emotional way of these creatures. Today there were three. As usual, when they had let the humans out, the lab was clean and orderly. The sloppy scientists had very efficient janitors, thought Adam. By this time the place was a shambles.

Out in the lab, there rose the honking sound of pain and anger — some of the noises they made, especially the commands, were recognizable now to the people — and a sharp slap. Then Mrs. Full hurried into the box, carrying a number of two-foot-square slabs under her arm.

"What happened, ma'am?"

"Hello, Adam. The criminal Watkins played a few bars of a real song on that device, and the brutes hit him." She laid down the slabs. "Our harmonies enrage them, I think perhaps cause them actual pain. They held the sides of their heads where ears ought to be, and shook themselves and made those hideous noises."

"They hit me when I sang the other day," said Adam, "remember?"

"That's right. Look here." She sat down, pulled one of the thick slabs onto her lap. "I found these under a shelf out there. One of the creatures knocked them off and I picked them up. I wondered why they had been up there, when so many stacks of them just sit around on the floor."

"I never saw any like these, ma'am. They have that little ridge on the edge there, and the border of different colored stuff around 'em."

"Watch what happens when I push the ridge upward, Adam. It's like an automatic button." She pressed it and the slab, at first gay orange, turned pale blue; on it appeared three lines of squiggly characters, like a cross between Arabic writing and Egyptian hieroglyphics.

"A magic slate," said Adam. "That's neat!"

"You haven't seen anything yet," she told him, and pushed the ridge again. The writing disappeared, and out of the slab leered a bull gorilla, paws on chest, eyeing Adam with beady, ridge-browed malevolence. It took a second for sanity to convince him that it was only a picture: three-dimensional, on a two-dimensional sheet of plastic, but so real he half-expected the beast to charge out at him. "What about that?" she asked.

He hit his thigh with a fist. It

was a photograph, he imagined, but made by an illusory process so far ahead of anything humanity could produce that it seemed he might glimpse whatever was behind the gorilla if he put his eyes down to the side of the slate. "Gosh!" he said, feeling it a little naïve but afraid to swear in front of her. "Isn't that something!"

"It's a book," she said, "an album of photographs. Look here."

The next picture was an equally miraculous one of half a dozen monkeys sitting on a tree trunk. Adam looked at it, then at the farthest trunk in their box of a room. Undeniably it was the same one.

Under the picture was a line of squiggles that probably spelled out the scientists' equivalent of "monkeys."

"They were here, in this place," said Adam. "The giants must have experimented on them too." He turned his eyes up to the woman and saw that she was white and drawn. "What happened to them?" he asked. "There aren't any monkeys here now."

"Exactly," she said. She put on the next picture, and after a moment the next.

Dogs greeted his eyes, so real he could almost hear them pant; a cow gazed stolidly at him; a cheetah sat on a mound of straw with clown's head cocked inquisitively; two cockatoos perched in

rigid still life on the silver rod of the prison box.

"What happened to them?" he asked again.

"The experiments ended," she said.

Then there flashed out a thing like a blue sponge with legs, a thing which sat in the cat's-cradle they had speculated so much about. From its center two ruby eyes blazed with three-dimensional fire. *That* never came from Earth! Mars or Venus could have produced it, maybe, or a planet so far from Earth that it bore no name. He said as much, his voice quavering.

She stared at him. Moistening her lips, she said, "If that was here, in this box, then *where are we?*"

He shook his head. He could not even guess. "What's next?"

The last picture in the slate was a group portrait of himself, the Fells, Summersby, Watkins, and Porfirio Villa.

When was that taken? They were sitting in a circle on the straw, eating something. Peering closely, he thought it must be the vegetables, for there was a small heap of round things next to Calvin Full which were probably buckeyes. Sunday night, then.

"They must have taken it through the food panel," he said. "Are there any more pictures?"

"That's all. I don't know what's in the other ones yet."

Calvin came in. She handed him the first "book" and showed him how to operate it. He flipped through it and when he came to the monstrosity in the web his eyes widened. "What is it?" he asked, in the hard twang of his region.

"A guinea pig, like all the others including us," his wife said.

"The tree trunks are explained now," said Adam, half to himself. "The sand box, too. That isn't a very scientific-looking treatise, but I guess it's more of a memento, a record of us all." He raised his brows in a facial shrug. "Us and the monkeys," he said. "Gosh!"

She took the next big slate on her lap. It was lavender. The first few pages to appear were covered with the curious writing, very large and only a few words to a page. Then came pictures of many things, not photographs but drawings and paintings in vivid color, and the things could in no way be linked to science. There were portraits of the tall creatures themselves, in various settings, some in labs like this one, some outdoors in a landscape that was predominantly scarlet and green; there were group scenes in which they ate odd-looking foods and walked down blue pathways and examined strange pets and familiar animals. Under each picture was a short grouping of

squiggles, marks, scribbles, etc.

"Can that be a science book?" asked Cal, leaning over his wife's shoulder. The beings were pictured as simply as possible, in no minute detail whatever, and their activities were of the dullest and most prosaic sort.

This pattern was followed through page after page — a picture (some of them were of things so alien they could not be placed by either the Fulls or himself), a single character, then a short word and another, long or short as the case might be. After a dozen of them had flashed on and off Adam noticed that the large character was always repeated at the beginning of the last word.

When he realized what it meant, the whole business clicked into focus. The whole damned deal, the lab and the scientists and the experiments and the meaning of the four magic slates, and everything. There was no particular reason why this last slate should have done it, for it was no more suggestive than many other things that he had seen; it was simply the last piece of evidence, the final push that sent him headlong into terrible knowledge.

Carefully, desperately, he went over it all in his mind, while the Fulls spoke in low tones.

God, he thought, oh, God! He was shivering now. He was more terrified than he had ever been

before. His tongue felt thick.

The punishments, the high stool and the arbitrary cuffs and swats; the gadgets, the mazes, the puzzles; were they all a part of the conditioning to neurosis of a scientific experiment? They were not.

Adam had found an answer, the only possible answer. The fourth slate had given it to him, although a hundred hints of it had shown up every day. His psych teacher would be ashamed of him for muddling along so many days, believing in a theory that was so plainly impossible.

He addressed Mrs. Full. She was a little sharper than her husband, and this was more in her line, too. He had to make her discover the same answer. He had to know it was right. And then he had to get out of that place in a hell of a hurry.

"Ma'am, you know what this is?"

"No, Adam."

"Look here. See this big letter, repeated at the first of this word?"

"Yes."

He flipped a few "pages" past. "It's the same with all of them, you see? And the middle word is always the same — four curly letters. You know what that middle word is?"

"No, Adam."

"It's 'stands for' or 'means.'"
He stared at her. "Get it?"

She thought an instant. "Of course, Adam, that's very clever of you." She wasn't scared yet. She hadn't seen the implication.

" 'Stands for?' " Calvin repeated.

"A stands for Apple," explained Mrs. Full. "Or A stands for Airship, or whatever it might be. It's an alphabet book, dear."

She still hadn't caught it. "Remember when Mr. Full built the cubbyhole here," Adam said, "and the giant knocked it down? Why was he angry?"

"I suppose they want to observe us without any hindrance."

"No, ma'am," he said with conviction. "That was simple frustration. They want to see everything, whether it's interesting to them or not. They aren't scientifically disappointed if they can't, they're just frustrated. Think of the punishment we get, slaps, the dunce stool."

"As though we were children," she said.

"Exactly. Now, here are these books. An alphabet book, and these others. What age would you figure them for? You taught kindergarten, you said. This is something I wouldn't know."

"I'd say they're for fairly bright children about five or six years old."

"Or for us," said her husband, "when they start to teach us their language."

"They are children's books,

though, with short sentences and the gaudy pictures our own children love." Mrs. Full stared at Adam. Her brown eyes widened. "Adam," she said, "you've guessed something."

"You guess it too," he pleaded. She had to corroborate his own idea. "Think of all the things about them we haven't been able to make out."

"Nursery books . . ." she said slowly. "Instability to the point of insanity, if you found it in adult humans. Sloppiness and inefficiency, when these machines point to a high degree of neatness of mind. Wandering attention, inability to concentrate for long periods. Positive tantrums over nothing. Cruelty and affection mixed without rhyme or reason." She took him by the arm, her fingers strong with fear and urgency. "Tell me, Adam."

His breath hissed. He was filled with panic. Where there had been only anxiety for his own life and his world, there was now a fearful knowledge that he could scarcely bear without shrieking. She had it too, but she didn't dare say it. It was a horrible thing.

"These machines," he said, "aren't scientific testers at all."

"Yes?"

"They're toys."

"Yes?"

"We aren't guinea pigs. We're — we're pets. They've had other

animals,' from Earth and from God knows where, and now they have people."

"Yes. Go on, say it." She thrust her face fiercely up to his.

"Those twelve-foot 'scientists' are kids," he said. Then he stopped and deliberately got his cracking voice under control. She was just as frightened as he was but she wasn't yelling. "It's the only answer. Everything fits it. They're about five years old."

Calvin Full frowned. "If that's true, we're in trouble."

"You're damn right we're in trouble!" said Adam. "A kid doesn't take care of a pet like a scientist takes care of a guinea pig or a white rat. If it annoys him, he's liable to pick it up and throw it at a wall! I might get my head torn off for singing, or you could be dismembered for making a mistake with one of those toys."

"Some children tear the wings off butterflies," said Mrs. Full. She stood up. "I'll go and tell the others," she said firmly. "It doesn't seem to me that we have much time left."

"If we start to bore them —" began Adam, and shut up.

She went out. In about five minutes everyone had come into the box but Watkins, who was playing the color organ. They discussed the discovery in low voices, as though the alien children might be listening; Villa and Summersby examined the slates. After a while

Watkins was pushed in, looking rather worn and frayed. Adam was standing in the far corner under the silver web. He saw the wall start to slide shut, remembered his dowel, and tried to see if it was still in place at the bottom of the wall.

He couldn't see it. Maybe it blended with the color behind it, or maybe somebody had accidentally kicked it out of place.

The wall slid shut.

IX

Summersby was losing the sense of being apart, of having no problems no matter what happened. These people had drawn him into their trouble against his will; the situation was so bad that he could no longer tell himself he didn't give a damn. So he had a bad heart! He couldn't turn his back on these poor devils because of that. It was stupid and selfish. He felt sorry for them. He was uncomfortable with them, as he always was with standard-sized people, and he would still repel any attempt on their part to get close to him; but he was a little chastened by what he had been through. He recognized that.

It was all very well to say he didn't care where he died, but it would be a hell of a lot more dignified to accomplish it as a free man, rather than as a harried rabbit. Even if he were killed trying

to escape, it would be endurable. But if his heart gave out while he was, say, trundling up and down the nursery in that ridiculous little auto thing, he knew his last breath would be a bitter one.

Adam had just said, "I laid a rod across the sill there." Summersby walked to the wall, which appeared to be closed as usual. Just as he came to it, he caught the sheen of metal in a thin line up the corner, and knew that he was seeing part of one of the machines in the nursery. The dowel had held the door.

Something moved outside; he could hear the dull slap of immense flat feet. They were going to be fed. He strolled away from the corner, saying quietly, "It worked, Adam. Don't check it now, though."

The small panel opened and one of the garishly hued platters was put in, loaded with a wriggling, seething mass of grubs and half-dead locusts.

"Supper?" cried Villa. "This is supper? Do they think we are a lot of African natives?"

"Well," said Adam, "I guess they were fooled by me." It was the first time he had made any sort of joke about his color. Possibly, thought Summersby, he's becoming one of the group, as I am. God knows the kid has as much reason to be bitter about people as I have; or more reason. It's put him on the defensive.

Summersby felt more chastened than ever.

No one cared to sample the insects. They walked away from the platter and hoped aloud that their captors would see the refusal and give them something else, but nothing was pushed in. After a quarter of an hour Watkins said, "Think it's safe to have a try at the door?"

"No," said Summersby.

Watkins jumped to his feet. "Listen, I've had all I can stomach of you!" he yelled. "If you don't want to help, okay, but keep your nose —"

"I was going to say that they'll be pumping in the sleep gas pretty soon, and we don't know whether they do it from outside the nursery or outside this box."

"That's right," said Calvin Full.

Watkins eyed him a moment. "I'm sorry, Summersby," he said then. "I shot off my mouth too quick."

"They filled the nursery with it once," sent on Summersby, "but it seems logical to think they could also let it into this room alone. Maybe it works on them, maybe not; if it does, then they wouldn't flood the nursery with it every night, because the adults have to come in and clean the place up."

"A clever thought, Mr. Summersby," said the woman.

"Not particularly. At any rate, I'm going to stand by the crack and try to get enough air to stay awake; then when I think the coast's clear, I'll shove the door open and scout around. If I find a way out, I'll come back and drag you into the nursery and wake you."

"Why are you doing this?" asked Villa suspiciously. "No, Mr. Big Man, I don't like you going out alone. I think you wouldn't come back. You don't like us."

Watkins, evidently on edge from his mauling by the children, whirled on the Mexican. "Oh, shut your yap! The guy's doing you a favor." Then he said to Summersby, "I'll come along."

Summersby grinned wryly.

"I'm not saying you'd run out on us, man." Watkins made the motions of going through his pockets for a cigarette, which some of them still did occasionally out of hopeful habit. "I know locks and I might be able to help if you ran into trouble."

"Come on along, then." He put an eye to the thin slit. "Here comes one of them. It's the head scientist." He grinned. "Or the kid who owns us, who lives in this house and invites his little pals in every day to play with his toys and his pets."

The monster disappeared. Presently Watkins said, "It's in. I'm sleepy."

Summersby stretched as tall as he could and put his mouth to the crack, trying to breathe only what air came through from the nursery. He saw the enormous child pass on its way to the door, and shortly the sound of its heavy feet stopped. He felt drowsy, his eyelids flickered. He beat his hands together, sucking in air from the opening. Villa started to snore.

Watkins said, "I'm about done, Summersby." He was kneeling at the crack below Summersby, and his voice was sluggish. In a few seconds he rolled over on the straw.

When did the adults come in to clean up? Summersby didn't dare wait much longer. He was fighting sleep with all his vigor. Possibly they wouldn't come till morning.

He had to chance it. He forced his fingers into the gap and heaved. The wall didn't move. Holding his breath, he propped one foot against the adjoining wall, dug his hands as far into the breach as possible, and hurled himself backward. The big door jolted an inch, hung, then slid back a couple of feet. He swung around and jammed himself through the aperture and the wall moved silently back into place; this time the dowel was not there, and when the wall stopped, there was no crack at the corner. Summersby must have kicked the dowel aside when he slid through.

Watkins was inside, asleep.

He breathed deeply, and the effects of the sleep gas died, so that he was wide awake and felt very excited and eager. To analyze the reasons for his eagerness would have killed it, and besides he was in a hurry. He ran to the great door of the playroom, whose lintel towered twenty feet from the floor. Hastily he tossed apparatus, boxes, toy blocks, until he had made a pile five feet high.

Scrambling up this, the things sliding under his feet, he waved an arm above his head in the place where he believed the electric eye beam to be. Then the pile collapsed, and he fell into it, giving one knee a terrific crack and skinning his knuckles. The door glided open.

The next room was deserted, and the soft bluish light was dimmer here than in the nursery. This place was far less cluttered, containing no more than a big yellow machine, a gigantic table, and two six-legged chairs. There was a picture on the wall, the size of a barn's side, which he did not stop to look at.

The opposite door was open. The third room was a dining hall, with two tables and a number of chairs, these of metal with eight legs each. Luckily, there was no one in it.

In the next room — all four were in a straight line, and he

thought, Either it's a long narrow house, or else it's as big as Rockefeller Center — there were a number of gadgets, colorful and complex like the children's toys, but of different construction. He glanced at them but did not pause until he came to the next door.

It was closed. He presumed its opener beam would be in the same place as that of the playroom, and looked around for something to stand on.

There seemed to be nothing small enough to move. He shoved at a couple of things, but they wouldn't budge. The only slim possibility was a big square brown box, set twelve feet off the floor on one of their mammoth tables. It was of a size to accommodate half a dozen cows, but looked as though it might be of flimsy enough materials, plastic probably, to push off the edge, from which it would fall exactly where he needed it.

He dragged a chair over, climbed up on its seat and then onto the table. He saw at once that the box would be immovable. There was an affair that might be a dynamotor attached to one side, various objects sticking out of the other, and four stacks of thick coils on top. He was turning away, hoping to find another door in one of the first rooms, when his eye was attracted to a square plate among the things on the right side of the box.

The plate was glass, for its surface shone under the blue light, and he thought he saw the pinpoint twinkling of stars in it.

On a hunch, he walked over to it. He knew quite a lot of astronomy and if this happened to be a telescope, he might be able to determine their location.

The field of the plate was full of stars, but in patterns he had never seen. He could not understand it. It was not a painting, for the stars twinkled. Where the blazes was the thing focused?

A huge dial beside the plate had a pointer and scores of notches, each labeled with a couple of squiggly characters. He turned the pointer experimentally. The screen blurred, showed a planet with rings: Saturn.

"Neat," he said to himself, and turned the pointer another notch. He got a view of a landscape, trees of olive green and crimson, seen from above. He tried other notches.

Finally, just as he had reminded himself that he had to hurry, he saw a familiar globe swim onto the glass. It was Earth, with the two Americas clearly defined.

What in hell . . . ?

He pushed the pointer on, and was given another landscape, this time of prosaic hue, a meadow with a cow in it. He clicked the thing another notch and got a constellation pattern again. He pushed it back to the cow.

He felt his heart thudding fast, too fast; and he hoped with all his faculties that he wouldn't conk out before he had solved this riddle. There were other dials, other pointers, a little behind the first. He turned one slowly.

The cow grew larger until it almost filled the screen. Only when he could see nothing but its broad placid back did he realize that he was looking at this scene, as at the others, from *above*.

He tried a third pointer. The land whipped by beneath his gaze. He came to a city, the buildings reaching up to him in a wonderful illusion of depth.

Then it dawned on him what the machine was, and he gasped.

There was no use in looking for the outer door. He had found the answer to their last problem, and he had to get back to the box with that answer and thrash it out with all of them. There might be a salvation for them and there might not.

Leaving the screen showing the city, he jumped down off the table, raced back through the room and into the next, the dining hall. Still there were no signs of any of the giants. He had crossed the threshold of the third room when he heard a door open on his right. There was no time to gape around; he covered thirty feet in five strides, dodged under the hanging shelf of the strange

yellow machine, like a low desk covered with cogwheels, and ran along beneath it till he came to the extreme end of the contrivance.

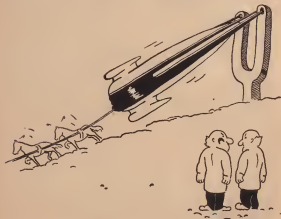
A pair of feet, either of which would have outweighed a draft horse, went past him; he dared not lean forward to see the rest of the brute, but it was undoubtedly an adult. It went into the play-room.

After twenty or twenty-five minutes, during which Summersby thought over the problem and agreed with himself that he couldn't find the solution alone, the giant came out of the play-

room, crossed near his hiding place, and went out through a door beside the huge picture. It was not in a hurry, so he decided it had not noticed his absence from the box.

He dragged an easy chair over to the nursery door. It was just four times the size of Summersby's Morris chair at home, and about eight times as heavy. As he was crawling up the leg to the seat, he recalled that he had a bad heart. If he hadn't been clinging to the plastic with both arms, he would have shrugged.

He intercepted the beam and



"Even if it works — it's *still* obsolete!"

opened the door. Having no more than half a minute to get through before it shut, he had to leave the chair where it was. He hoped none of the adults would realize that its position had changed.

The playroom was clean and neat. Likely it would remain unvisited through the night. He went to the box and only then remembered it was shut tight. What did the kids do when they opened it during the day? He had seen them at it twice. They laid their hands on top of the box, there on the left.

Hauling over enough junk to make a pair of steps, he got onto the roof of the box. There was a bar, set into the coaming. He pressed it, leaned over, and saw the wall slide back. A second push returned it to its shut position. He opened it again, swung his legs over the edge, pressed the bar once more and dropped. Snatching up a green dowel from the floor, he jumped into the box as the door was closing. He had just time to lay the rod across the threshold, as Adam had done, before the wall reached it and was held:

Trying not to breathe, Summersby picked up Watkins and slung him over his shoulder. He forced his fingers into the crack and heaved. Again he threw his weight against the wall.

Then he was buckling at the knees, trying desperately to bring

his mouth next to the opening, but not quite making it.

"Describe it again," said Watkins. "Give me all the details you can think of."

As Summersby went over what he remembered of the brown machine, Watkins tried to envisage it. A tough job, and he might not be able to handle it. To reverse a thing like that — when there'd be at least one or two principles he'd never heard of — well, that would be the job of a lifetime.

"How do you know that it's the instrument that brought us here?" he asked.

"It must be." Summersby looked intent, almost eager. "It has those dials that focus it almost pin-point on any planet they want; at least, I saw quite a few planets, from a distance and close up. I saw a cow and a city on Earth. Then there's the big brown box. It's hollow — the door was half open. If they bring things, living things, from other planets, they need a receiving station large enough to take 'em. The box. It's logical."

"It sure is." Adam whistled. "So we're on another planet. That was plain, if we'd thought about it seriously. No place on Earth could hide a race like this. Not with all the factories they must have to produce the toys and what you saw out there."

"Why couldn't we be inside the

Earth?" asked Mrs. Full stridently.

Watkins said, "He looked *down* on Earth. That argues another planet."

"But how did they get us here? In two days?"

Watkins scratched his bristled chin and thought aloud. "It must have been instantaneous. Remember, we went through a quarantine and were healed of just about everything that was wrong with us. That must have taken a while."

"The octopus was still wet," said Adam, "and the grubs and locusts were still kicking. They must focus that rig on Earth and push a button and here it is, like that. Instant transmission of matter." He smiled weakly, as though he were proud of the phrase. He looked very frightened, thought Watkins, and unhappy.

Tom Watkins was scared, too, but not especially unhappy. For the first time in almost twenty years, he was free of worry about the bulls, the law. He only wished he knew what had happened to his loot.

"The planet," said Cal, "whatever its name is, must have the same gravity and atmosphere as Earth. Same water, too."

"That's right. So it's produced a race of critters with plenty of human characteristics," said Watkins.

"Have they done this before?"

asked Mrs. Full "I mean do you think we're the first to be snatched up?"

"No, I don't," said Watkins, surprised that she was talking directly to him. "People disappear all the time. Look at the famous ones: Judge Crater, Ambrose Bierce —"

"Somebody mention the *Marie Celeste*," growled Summersby.

The wall began to open.

"Here's the plan, quick," said Watkins. "I've got to get out and find the machine, and see if I can gimmick it so it'll work backward, send us home. The rest of you create a diversion, keep the kids' minds off me."

"What kind of a diversion?" asked Villa. His abstracted face showed plainly that he was thinking of his chili stand and what he would say to the idiot relief man about conditions he would doubtless find therein.

"If you were a kid with pets, intelligent ones, what would you watch them do for hours? Something — unordinary — something you'd never imagine they'd do." He looked at his chronograph. "It's just ten. I never saw the gadget I couldn't figure out in two hours; if I'm not back by noon, you'd better come out, Summersby."

"What if it's four-dimensional?" asked Adam.

"It's possible I can cook up a

way to reverse its action anyway. There are some principles of electricity and mechanics that must be universal."

"Shall we run the machines for them?" asked Mrs. Full. "To distract the children?"

"They're used to that," said Watkins. "They bore easy. Suppose you're a kid with a normal regard for pets. You've had cats and dogs and rabbits and now you have monkeys. The monkeys are a lot smarter and more versatile, but they have their limits too. You get jaded with 'em. But one day they—" he snapped his fingers — "they start playing soldiers! They drill, stage mock battles, die and come to life, scrimmage—hell, you go nuts! You can't take your eyes off 'em!"

"That's it," said Villa promptly. "The children have gorillas, cows, they have never seen anything like war."

"Maybe they don't know what war is," said Adam. "It might just look as if we were fighting. None of their toys show a sign of war being ever waged by this race, like our own kids' toys do."

"The toys of any people reflect their civilization in an unreliable and distorted way," said Cal Full rather stuffily. "A visitor from Mars in one of our playrooms would conclude that we already have spaceships and ray guns, and that our usual clothing is chaps, sombreros, and spacesuits."

"They'll get the idea," Watkins said impatiently. The giant children outside were bawling the word that meant "Come!" He was in a hurry. These fools were always arguing. "Let's go," he said. "The four of you line up over there, catch the kids' eyes, and Highpockets can boost me up to the beam. Then he'll join you."

Watkins grinned tightly, slapped Adam on the shoulder, poked Villa in the belly, and dived behind the nearest many-colored pile of gear the moment he saw the children weren't watching him. As he went toward the door, he heard Villa saying, "My fourth cousin Pancho was a great man for war, so I will be general. Spread out in the thin line and be ready to march when I command."

Summersby followed Watkins, and they came to the door. Watkins managed to get up on the big man's shoulders, and waved a hand above his head. Nothing happened.

"Stand on them," said Summersby.

He struggled to do so. "*Un, das, tres,*" roared the Mexican down the hall. "Begin!"

This time Watkins found the beam. The door glided aside. He dropped off Summersby's shoulders, jumped into the next room. A quick look showed him it was empty. As the door closed he

heard Villa shouting hoarsely.

"Make bang noises for the guns. Fall dead, spring to life. We are mountain fighters of great skill. Climb on machines, drop off with bullets in your head, play you are —"

The door cut him off. Watkins chuckled. "What a ham," he said. He started for the opposite door.

X

It was ten minutes to twelve. Summersby was panting like a spent hound. He had not exercised in months, not since the doctors had told him his heart was just about gone, and he was surprised that he hadn't keeled over before now. Dashing around playing guerrilla like some six-year-old! It had been a damn good idea, though. The giant children — there were two of them today — were still enthralled, lying on their bellies with their furry watermelon heads propped in fantastic two-thumbed hands.

Leaning against a pink plastic maze wall, puffing, he thought, I've almost grown to like them. Why?

Because for the first time since he was sixteen, John Summersby had to bend his neck back to look up at someone. These grotesque humanoid beings were the only living things which did not make him feel overgrown, uncouthly

out of proportion, a hulking lout. If a chair was too narrow for him, it would be like the head of a pin to one of these kids; if a fork felt uncomfortably small in his own hand, it would be a minik in indeed in one of those vast paws.

In their shadows, Summersby was a very small man. It was an unwonted sensation, the most satisfying he had ever experienced.

He looked at them out there, as they lay watching Mrs. Full and Adam mowing down Cal and Villa with imaginary Brownings. He grinned, felt his lips curve in the unaccustomed grimace, and thought with no particular bitterness that he was getting mellow in his last days. "Hello, High-pockets," he said softly to the kid that owned him. "How's the weather up there?"

At five to noon the door opened. Summersby, seeing its silent motion, left off the mimic gunplay and started for the wall, where he could intercept Watkins and find out whether he'd been successful. But the safe-cracker came running down the middle of the room, yelling.

"Come on, everybody!"

"Come on?"

The two giant children were on their feet, uncertain of what was happening. Obviously they didn't realize Watkins had been out of the room at all.

"The adults spotted me!" roared the blond man, swinging

his briefcase wildly; where had he found that? "They're after me!"

Summersby let out an involuntary grunt when through the twenty-foot door came an eighteen-foot creature, a thing so mind-shakingly huge that even the ranger's size complex wasn't pleased by it. This was an adult: leaner in the body, broader of hand and thicker of limb, wearing trouserlike garments and a flaring jacket of royal purple caught by a ruby bar, it advanced calmly into the hall, clumping flat-footed in three yard strides. From its heavy-lipped gash of a mouth came noises like a whole orchestra badly in need of tuning.

"Hwhrangg!" it cried, waving its hands in the air. "Broomingg!" It appeared to be soothing the children, telling them that Daddy was here.

Mrs. Full, on the control platform, screamed. Her husband ran to her. Summersby stepped out irresolute, Adam stood stunned. But Porfirio Villa, afire with the heady make-believe carnage of the afternoon, was as quick to act as his fourth cousin Pancho could have been. A dozen waddling leaps, a swift swing of his legs over the side, and the Mexican landed in the little red vehicle with the vast control board, the car that only he had been able to master. Pressing buttons, pulling plungers, sliding levers, he whirled it around

and sent it at the towering adult.

The beast skipped out of his way, blaring anger; he came about sharply, gunned his "motor" — if it was that — and rammed the gigantic enemy on the leg. There was the clear sharp snap of bone breaking. As Villa's car overturned, the creature fell at full length, with a crash like an elephant dropping out of a tree. It contracted its body and gripped its ankle with both hands, honking dismally.

Summersby was running. He skidded up to the groveling Villa, yanked him to his feet and shoved him out of range of the injured beast. The two children had broken into the barks that were their equivalent of weeping, one drawing its goading rod. Summersby crouched, went toward it, hoping to bring it down before it stunned him. As he came within diving range, though, the orange airship streaked over his head and jammed its nose into the child's belly. It folded over with a whoosh, grabbing its middle, as the toy wobbled off in eccentric flight.

Mrs. Full, the expert at flying the miniature vessel, was hecticly jamming her blocks along their metal rods; something had gone wrong with the mechanism at the crash. Her husband hauled her off the seat and rushed her toward the door.

The remaining child stood in

the middle of the floor, staring at its groaning, breathless playmate and at the maimed adult, honking a little frightened song to itself. Skirting it, the humans made for the door as fast as they could go.

Summersby overtook Watkins. "I found it okay," panted the crook.

"Can you work it?" They were through the door now, the two of them in the lead, running across the first of the rooms.

"There were other adults," said Watkins. "Three or four saw me. I don't know where they went."

"Can you work it?"

"The matter transmitter?" He grinned briefly. "Sure. There's two principles I don't get, but —"

The doorway before them was crowded by several of the giants. They came through, not hurrying, talking rather placidly; their movements had the swiftness of the children's without their jerkiness. In their hands were green goads. They pointed and came down upon the humans.

"Scatter!" yelled Summersby, and dodged under the shelf of the machine where he had taken cover last night. He went to the end. In seconds they would be peering under the shelf, spotting him, thrusting in their shockers and laying him out. And, damn it all, he cared! He didn't want to be stopped when so much of the fight was won. His heart might stop,

he couldn't help that, but till it did he wanted to go on fighting. Balling his fists, he started to leave the sanctuary. Then he heard Adam Pierce begin to sing.

He had a high tenor voice, mellow with a sweet touch of huskiness in it, and he was singing "Drink to Me Only" at the top of his lungs.

He hadn't gone crazy! Summersby remembered the punishments they had endured for making harmonious noises on the musical toy, the slap Adam got for singing, the agonies the kids had gone through at Earth-type melody. Adam had thought of the only weapon they could use — song.

"Or leave a kiss within the cup," roared Summersby, and without further thought walked into the room. Watkins had chimed in now, breathless but true of pitch.

Three eighteen-foot brutes were standing there. Vast hands were pressed to bulbous heads, and agonized croaks came from gaping mouths. Whatever a tune did to them, it wasn't pleasant. What weird auricular structure could cringe so from a simple song? It did, and that was enough.

Mrs. Full clutched his arm. "One of them struck Calvin with his prod," she wailed.

"Where is he?"

"Near that door."

Beginning to sing again, Sum-

mersby pulled for the prone milk inspector. He picked him up and slung him, limp as a dead doe, over his left shoulder. The others were gathering. He motioned them forward, and, as Watkins joined him, ran on.

"Where'd you find your case?"

"On a table. Hope the dough is all in there." He glanced back. "They're coming. We're racking 'em but they're game."

The woman, Adam and Villa were right behind them. As they reached the midpoint of the third room, the dining hall, one of the beings staggered through the door behind them. It had lost its goad and was flattening its hands on its skull as Adam and Mrs. Full swung into "Dixie." It came at them like a drunk, unable to navigate a straight course but determined to reach them. It'll stamp on us, thought Summersby, easing Full back a little on his arm. It only has to come down once or twice with that Cadillac-sized foot and we're squashed ants. He sang.

"To live and die in. . . ."

The second brute appeared, lurched over and fell on the table, caught up a flat trencher and skimmed it at them. It was as big as a bathtub. "Drop!" cried Summersby, went to one knee, felt the wind of the trencher's passing ruffle his hair.

The next door was closed. Summersby slammed himself flat

against the wall and Adam, catlike and fast, scrambled up over him, stood on his shoulders and broke the controlling beam. The aliens came down the room like two epileptic furies. "Sing!" said Watkins. "Everybody!" The door slid aside with maddening slowness.

"Try a fast one," said Mrs. Full. "'Blow the Man Down.'" It was a funny suggestion, coming from her. Summersby actually chuckled as he started to sing.

"As I was a-walkin' down Paradise Street. . . ."

The third monster entered the dining hall, caught the full blast of their five voices (Calvin Full was still out, but Villa was giving a rum-tum-tum accompaniment),



"Earth to Mars in only four years, and we can prove it."

and sank to its knees, shaking its head as though it had been sapped. One of the others made a desperate leap at them, landing prone within a yard of Summersby. Melodies affect its organ of equilibrium, he thought; poor thing's in agony. "I says to her, Lollie, and how d'ye do. . . ."

They were through the doorway now. The only pursurer still on its feet was reeling after them, green red still held in one shaking hand. Its rust-red eyes were bulging out from their deep pits, and a thin trickle of violet ichor came from its nostril. It made guttural, creaking noises.

"Down at the end," said Watkins. "The brown box."

"Did you gimmick it?" asked Summersby.

"I think so. We have to take a chance. The main idea is easy. I guessed at a few things, but I think it'll work. Unless one of our big pals checked on it and mucked up my improvements."

It was twenty yards away; but so was the last of the monsters. Summersby changed Full to his other arm and added his voice to the general clamor for a bar or so, then asked Watkins the question that had been nagging at him. "Can we all go? Or does somebody have to send the others?"

"I'll send you. I'm not too sure I can get through. The dials and focusing lenses are on the outside, you know."

"I'll work it, then." They were at the table; he dropped Full and helped Adam shove a chair to the table. The woman and Villa were singing "Quiereme Mucho" in Spanish, their voices a trifle hoarse by now.

"You will like hell. It'd take me ten minutes to teach you how to work the transmitter. Think we have ten minutes?"

The giant was standing still, weaving, pawing the air. It would not give in to its pain and dizziness. If it fell now it might hit them. It was that close.

"You've got to show me. I have a bad heart. I'm due to die in a month or two," said Summersby urgently.

Watkins stared at him. "Do you think you went through the past hours with a rotten ticker? Don't make me laugh."

"It's true. I'm just waiting to die. You're no more than thirty-eight or forty, and you've got twenty-two thousand dollars there," he said, gesturing at the briefcase. "I don't give a damn about the morals of the case. You're a decent fellow and you ought to have this break."

Watkins snarled, as he gave the valiantly singing Mrs. Full a hand up to the chair seat, "You think I have a martyr complex? You think I want to stay here? I'm elected, that's all! It's me stays or it's everybody! I haven't the time to teach you to work it!"



"But dear, one must take the broad view at times."

He hit Summersby a hard blow on the chest. "Your heart's fixed up the same as Adam's eyes and Cal's sinus. These gentry could turn your lungs upside down without opening you-up, they're that good. Go back to your woods. You're okay."

"No," said Summersby with stubborn rage. "I'm sick of waiting to die. That's why I took the coaster ride in the first place. That's why I wanted —"

"You're nuts. You have a heart to match your frame, High-pockets, if you'd admit it. Hand up old Cal."

The monster took two wobbling steps toward them. They were all on the chair, then clambering onto the table. Watkins swung open the door of the brown box. "Fast," he said urgently, "fast!"

Adam had Cal by the armpits; he lugged him into the dark interior. Villa jumped in, Mrs. Full following. Summersby confronted the safe-cracker.

"Show me how to work the machine. I don't believe they could mend a bad heart."

Watkins handed him the briefcase with so unexpected a motion that Summersby took it automatically. "Send it to Roscoe & Bates, if I don't turn up. I guess I can't use it here." He put a hand under his coat. "Go on, High-pockets."

"No!"

Watkins drew a gun, a small steel-blue thing that looked as wicked as a rattler. Summersby had had no idea that he was carrying it. "Hop'in', tall man," said Watkins, grinning. "You're holding up the works."

Reluctantly Summersby backed away, stood in the door of the box. He could jump Watkins, but if the mechanism were so complex, he would only doom them all. "You're out of your head," he said.

"Sure."

Abruptly above the safe-cracker towered the fantastic form of their forgotten enemy, reaching for them, one hand still to its head. Summersby inflated his lungs.

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot," he roared tunelessly, "and never brought to mind!"

Everyone joined him. It was a startling cataclysm of sound, even to Summersby. The alien tottered, hand outstretched; its mouth fell open, its eyes popped, the violet blood coursed from its nostril; with a shudder it clawed the air, honked grotesquely, and pitched forward, half on and half off the table, where it lay gurgling. A spot on the side of its skull, about the width of a gallon jug, on which the hair grew sparse and gray, pulsed as though there were no bone beneath the skin, as though a bellows within was puffing it in and out, in and out. Its ear, thought Summersby. Probably

we've wrecked it for good. Maybe the thing will die. Then Watkins is a gone goose, if he stays. He was about to lunge at the steady gun-hand when Adam and Villa yanked him backward into the box. Adam was crying.

"Try and come too, Mr. Watkins, try and come too," he said.

Watkins laughed. "I'll make out okay, son. I like my hide pretty well." He waved with the gun. "Be seeing you." Then he tossed the dark weapon into the box and slammed the door.

XI

There was darkness, then bright sun. They stood on a street corner, and Summersby could read the signs as plainly as Watkins must have read them in the focusing lens of the matter transmitter on the unknown planet.

Broadway and 42nd Street. The five of them had clicked into being on the busiest corner of New York.

"That old crook," said Adam, gulping. "He focused us here for a gag."

"I look awful," gasped Mrs. Full, and Summersby, glancing at her, agreed. Like all of them, she had lost weight; her skin showed the effects of a week's washing without soap; and her skirt and blouse were mussed up, to say the least. All the men needed shaves. Calvin Full, re-

covering gradually from the shock of the goad, and still supported by Villa, looked like a Bowery wino.

"Is he coming?" asked Adam, addressing Summersby. "Will Watkins be along too?"

"I don't know," said Summersby. He stared up at as much of the sky as he could see beyond the block-high ads. "I hope so."

"My chili stand!" shouted Villa, suddenly awakening to the fact of New York about him. "That no-good relief man! I've got to see what he's done to it!" Pushing Calvin to Adam, who grasped him by an arm, the Mexican waved hurriedly. "Come and see me," he said to all of them. "I'll give you a bowl free." He hastened away into the crowd.

"We've got to see about our clothes at the hotel," said Mrs. Full. She sounded apologetic. "I hope we'll see you again, Adam, and Mr. Summersby."

"I doubt it," said Summersby. He looked at Full, "Coming out of it?" he asked.

"Thanks," said Cal, nodding. He took his wife's hand. "Gave you my address, didn't I?"

"I have it," said Summersby.

"Well, good-bye," said Mrs. Full.

"You did a fine job up there," said Adam Pierce. "I'm proud to have known you, ma'am."

"Thank you, Adam. Good-bye." They were gone.

"I suppose you'll be going too,"

said Adam, somewhat wistfully.

"I guess so. You'll go home?"

"I guess so," Adam repeated.

"My folks will be sore. They'll never believe such a story. They'll think I ran wild or something."

Summersby, still looking upward, and wondering if he could be staring blindly at the planet which Watkins must be trying to leave even now, put a hand on his heart. "Was he right? They did fix up everyone else." He laughed. It was the first time he had laughed normally in seven months. "I could get into the rangers again," he said. "Adam, I've got to see a doctor. I've got to find out something."

"Yes, sir," said Adam unhappily. Summersby looked at him. "Really worried about your folks?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll come home and tell them, if you like."

Adam said gratefully, "Mr. Summersby, you're a gentleman."

"No," said Summersby, "no."

"Yes, sir, you are. Can we wait just a minute more? Mr. Watkins

might be along any minute now."

"We'll wait."

After a while Adam said, "Remember that first feed we got up there, pies and cookies and glass?"

"I remember it."

"They must have just aimed that machine at a bakery window here on Earth, and taken glass and all."

"That's it."

"Probably it was called a smash-and-grab robbery, down here." He kicked something, bent down and picked it up. It was the safe-cracker's gun. "I didn't think he'd carry one," said the boy. He looked closer at it. "God!"

"What is it?" Summersby shifted the briefcase and held out a hand. Adam laid the weapon in his big palm. "He must have won it at the park that day," Adam said. "That old crook! Old faker!"

Summersby held it up. It looked like a small automatic of blued steel, but it was plastic. He turned it over. A pencil-sharpener.

Summersby grunted. "A toy," he said, giving it back to Adam. "Nothing but a kid's toy."



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